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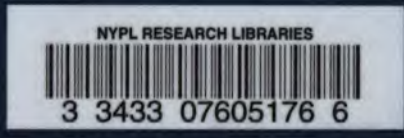
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WARREN HYDE

WARREN HYDE

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "UNCHAPERONED"

NEW YORK
R. F. FENNO & COMPANY
9 AND 11 EAST 16TH STREET

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Warren Hyde

WARREN HYDE.

CHAPTER I.

NELDA CHASE turned from the window through which she had peeped, at the ringing of the door-bell, and looked at her sister in tragic despair.

"It is Mrs. 'Potato' Carlton! This is the last straw—I cannot bear it! *You* will have to go to the door, Virginia."

"I won't, Nelda. I'm not equal to Mrs. 'Potato' this afternoon; I declare I will not see her!"

"But some one has got to let her in!" said Nelda, staring at her sister in dismay, almost in tears.

"If that is your conviction, dear, go and open. She may ring the house down and I sha'n't budge!"

The two girls looked at each other, Nelda in distress, Virginia with a hard determination in her handsome face—when suddenly, with one consent, they broke into irrepressible laughing, Virginia crushing her hand-

kerchief to her lips to stifle her rising hilarity lest it should be heard by the visitor at the door, and Nelda holding her hand to her side in pain at her efforts to choke back her little shrieks of amusement.

"Any one would think we were millionaires and took pupils only for entertainment," said Virginia ironically. "She has come to pay her child's bill. Under the circumstances, dear sister (seeing we've no winter wraps and the coal is nearly all gone) I should advise you to answer that bell."

Another loud ring startled them into action. "It is more your school than mine," argued Nelda in an injured tone as she started slowly toward the door at the other end of the room; "you are the principal, so you ought to come and meet her."

"Pray, what do I keep an assistant for?" called Virginia with a chuckle, as she sank back in her deep window-seat where she was hidden from the front of the room by a large blackboard.

They had been sitting in their schoolroom, on the ground-floor of their small house, just after the afternoon session, and had been going over, together, an account of their debit and credit for the past month; and the results of their arithmetical calculations were so crushing as to render a visit, just now, from the objec-

tionable Mrs. Carlton, a hardship not to be met with equanimity.

They were striking girls; Virginia, the elder, tall and handsome, with a stateliness of bearing (at least with strangers) which made her generally feared rather than liked; Nelda, a small, pale, ethereal-looking girl, with a face somewhat abnormally expressive of fine, keen sensibility; and, at the same time, with a fire in her dark, soft eyes which suggested a heart very restive in its bondage to tasks and hours. Virginia's manner and presence gave an impression of strong self-reliance, and conscious superiority which most people were inclined to resent; a spirit of mockery possessed her which expressed itself in her bright, keen eyes and flexible, though firm, mouth, in a way that made her appear a little hard and unsympathetic to those who had not known her long enough to have read deeper into her nature. "She is making fun of me. She is too clever, she sees through me!" persons conscious of any weakness or absurdity in themselves, were sure to feel as they talked with her. But about Nelda, on the contrary, there was a warm sympathy, a wistful gentleness, which seemed so characteristic of the girl that an occasional rare outburst of some of the pent-up enthusiasm of her nature, or a display of her lively sense of humor, had often been a surprising revelation even to those who had

known her long. Virginia of course seemed the stronger character of the two, but Nelda was the favorite with the patrons of their little school.

Though in manners and appearance so different, these girls were, *au fond*, very much alike, very much in harmony (an unusual thing in sisters) and devotedly attached to each other.

There was one difference between them, however, which was not a mere external one. Nelda, in both action and thought, was apt to be swayed primarily by her feelings; Virginia, though her emotions were no less strong and deep, was more ruled by her judgment. These differing traits were always manifested in any discussion between them. Nelda's opinions were prone to be prejudices born of her affections and her profound sense of reverence for all that was established and time-honored. Virginia, though likely to come to the same conclusions as Nelda's, arrived at them by another method—by her clear-eyed discernment which did not fear to look time-honored institutions in the face and question them if she saw cause so to do. Nelda could glory in and reverence heroes and martyrs of a romantic past; but a nineteenth century hero, preaching a radically new gospel, would have aroused in her nothing but antagonism. In spite of this, however, hers was not a narrow nature; her sympathies were

too quick and keen, her charity too broad, to admit of narrowness.

"The Chase girls," as the people of Winchester commonly called them, had, upon their first coming to live in the town, been regarded with considerable respect, not to say awe. They had some marks of superiority which were considered to distinguish them from the generality of Winchester young women. Their not being native Winchestrians was in itself enough to make them interesting; and their Boston accent, no less than their very reserved and dignified manners, were looked upon, in contrast with Winchester accent and manners, as indications of unusual culture and refinement. They had, in short, a stamp of high breeding—"an air," as Mrs. Carlton admiringly called it—that made itself felt like a fine aroma.

The kindness and hospitality which Winchester society had been inclined to show to them on their first settling in the place, was, however, abruptly checked by the calamities which befell them shortly after their arrival. Their collapse from ample wealth into poverty upon the sudden death of their father, the duty which then devolved upon them of supporting not only themselves but their two little brothers, the opening of their small private school, the care of their household, all combined to consume their time and energies to an ex-

tent which effectually cut them off from the social life of the town; and after a few years, they had come to have none but business relations with any one. Society could not be expected to go out of its way to pay attentions to people who had neither time nor money for returning its favors.

The *parvenue* class figured rather conspicuously in Winchester, as it does in most small cities of Pennsylvania, and the social tone was therefore not high. Riches, rather than culture, were the passports to consideration; so the struggling, care-laden "Chase girls" were left to fight their battles alone. Society looking on from a safe distance, still regarded them with some respect and esteem; but they lived isolated and unknown.

Right nobly, however, they fought their way, though it cannot be affirmed that they were serenely contented in their lot. On the contrary, they were disposed to feel rebellious at times, under the crushing burden of responsibility which weighed upon them and robbed their young lives of all natural pleasures and freedom.

Perhaps it was the sense of humor which was characteristic of them both, that often saved them from utter despondency. In moments of hysterical reaction from the repression of their native buoyancy of spirit, one of them, with a

generous wish to rescue the other from despair, would cleverly cast their misfortunes and trials into the light of an absurd mock-tragedy—and these moments of gayety were, it must be confessed, the only relief they ever knew from the constant strain of their sordid and other cares. In repose, their faces were sad and anxious.

Mrs. Carlton, whom Nelda now admitted into the schoolroom, justified in her appearance the disrespectful epithet of "Potato" by which the sisters had christened her, so monotonously round and plump and brown were her face and form.

"I suppose, Miss Nelda, you thought I was never coming to pay you!" she said in a loud voice, rustling into the room in her obtrusively conspicuous toilet of heavy silk and diamonds, and bringing with her a delicate atmosphere of violet scent. She was a social leader in Winchester, and she never met the Chase girls except in a business way. A certain cheap familiarity which always characterized her rather patronizing manner with them afforded them amusement sometimes; but she grated on them a little, and when they were tired and worried, as they were this afternoon, they did not relish it. Virginia, in her window-seat, felt glad that the blackboard concealed her from view. She had taken up a volume of

Marcus Aurelius as a fortification against the spirit of cynicism likely to be aroused in her by such of the talk of this woman as should come to her from the other end of the room.

"I owe you for two quarters, don't I?" Mrs. Carlton asked when she and Nelda were seated.

"Three quarters, isn't it?" said Nelda in a tone of sensitive constraint; there was nothing which she and her sister so loathed as these inevitable money transactions; their experiences in this line were often embarrassing enough; occasionally they even allowed themselves to be imposed upon rather than cavil with overreaching patrons; Nelda, especially, was given to this weakness.

"Why, no, it is only two quarters—school has been in session only two," repeated Mrs. Carlton.

"The third quarter is half gone and the tuition is payable in advance, you know," said Nelda quietly; "so that makes you in debt for three quarters."

"O, but I would rather pay at the end of a quarter than at the beginning. Then I feel I have had my money's worth, you know. So I'll just pay you for two, to-day."

She opened her purse and took out some bills. When she offered them to Nelda, the girl did not touch them.

"The tuition is payable quarterly in advance,

Mrs. Carlton," she repeated with an effort. "That is our rule."

"O, I didn't know you were really particular about it," Mrs. Carlton said, looking at her in surprise and with a shade of displeasure. "But do you know I think it a poor rule, for suppose the children should be in school only half the quarter?"

"In case of illness, we should refund the money."

"I should think it ought to be refunded in any case, Miss Nelda."

"We don't deduct for absence except in case of illness."

"But do you think that quite fair?"

"If we did not think it fair, we should not have it for our rule."

"I don't see how you can think it fair," persisted the woman. "I may want to take Adelaide to New York for a couple of weeks this coming term and it doesn't seem just, that I should pay for her school tuition when she isn't here."

"Private schools could not be carried on, if teachers deducted for all absences."

"Well; I guess I shall have to pay it then. Here," she said, counting it out, "that is the amount for three quarters. Only I can't really think such an arrangement quite fair to the patrons. Now," she added, putting away her

purse, "I want to ask you, Miss Nelda, about sending Dorothy as a visitor now and then. She cries so, to come with Adelaide. But Adelaide says you don't want Dorothy to come so often. Is that true?"

"We should be glad to have her regularly entered as a pupil. She is here nearly every day, you know."

"O, but she is too little to be taught any thing. I don't want to be paying for her. I would rather pay out the money for another nurse. Dorothy needs a nurse all to herself, she is so mischievous! And the nurse I have is busy every minute with my baby—he is so delicate. It is a great relief to me to get Dorothy off to school a few times a week with Adelaide. But I don't care to enter her as a pupil. I really would rather have another nurse."

"But this school isn't a nursery, Mrs. Carlton," said Nelda smiling.

"O, does Dorothy worry you much?"

Nelda laughed; "I'm afraid she does," she said gently. "If she came every day as a pupil, we could soon have her fall into line with the other children—but coming about three and a half days in the week, and not having any work to do, she is rather unmanageable and makes a good deal of disturbance."

"Yes, I should not wonder if she did—she is

such a lively child. And so very nervous," she added pathetically. "My children are all so nervous. They must not be excited, Miss Nelda, please remember. For really they are very nervously constituted. Then you say," she added, a little coldly, "that Dorothy can't come as a visitor?"

"She might come for half a day about twice a week," Nelda said, looking down and turning a ring on her finger; she felt ashamed for Mrs. Carlton. "She may come every Tuesday and Friday afternoon—if you still want to send her," she added.

"Very well; but it won't be an easy matter to keep her at home so much—she is so very fond of you and Miss Chase! She is a very affectionate child—indeed I sometimes think she is too sensitive and affectionate. Well, then, that matter is settled. How is your sister?" she asked, sinking back comfortably in her chair as if for a long chat—a sign which made Nelda inwardly sigh.

"Very well, thank you."

"She is so different from you, isn't she?"

"People seem to think so," said Nelda. "But in many ways we are alike."

"Does it pay you to keep your school?" Mrs. Carlton asked curiously.

"When we cannot make it pay, I suppose we shall 'shut up shop,'" Nelda evasively answered.

"What do you make a year, clear, now, if it is a fair question?"

"Excuse me," said Nelda, rising and going to a front window; "I'll draw up that blind a little—the room seems dark. The days are short now, aren't they?" she added as she came back to her chair.

"Yes, and of course that makes your expenses higher, when you have to burn so much gas. I hope you keep the schoolroom good and warm, Miss Nelda, do you? Adelaide and Dorothy are so susceptible to cold."

"Our own little brothers are in our school, you know. We would not be likely to risk their health in a cold room, even if we were conscienceless about the other children."

"Your little brothers must be a great care with all your other expenses and work, aren't they? Now if you could be free of them and be foot-loose, you would get on so much more easily. You and Miss Chase might get into boarding-school positions. It is a pity."

Nelda made no answer. Mrs. Carlton looked at her with the most friendly interest and curiosity. She wished the little teacher were not so very reticent about her affairs, and would talk more freely—there were so many things she would like to be told. But she knew from experience that it was useless to ask her many questions.

"O, have you heard the news?" she abruptly asked. "About Warren Hyde?"

"No," said Nelda.

"He is coming home. He sailed on the tenth from Liverpool. And he is expected in Winchester to-morrow."

"I don't know him," Nelda replied, implying therein that the news of his home-coming could not be a very vital matter to her. "We rent this house from him through his agent," she added, "but we never see anything of him."

"But you know about him, don't you? You were in Winchester at the time of his divorce, three years ago."

"Yes, I think we were—but it was just about the time of our trouble—of my father's death—and of course——"

"O, of course, then, you wouldn't remember much about it. It was a queer case! You see, before his divorce," Mrs. Carlton explained, "Warren was considered such a superior young fellow in every way—in brains and blood and character and everything. He had married Edith Prince, the very loveliest girl in town. But," she said impressively, "when they had been married not one year, and their baby was only a month old, Edith sued for a divorce on the ground of *cruel and inhuman treatment!* Nobody could understand it. It was so unaccountable—because, you know, both of them

were considered such fine sort of people. Edith has one of these sweet, gentle dispositions (just like yours, Miss Nelda,) and she is the very most conscientious girl I ever knew! I don't see how any one could quarrel with her, she is so amiable. As for Warren, he was perfectly fascinating when you met him in society—so handsome and chivalrous and all that—and my husband says everyone thought he was a man of very good principles. He was considered very clever too—he graduated with high honors at Yale, and he could make the best after-dinner speeches! And he often wrote articles for the New York and Philadelphia papers that were said to be fine! Every one thought Edith Prince was marrying so well, for Warren was, of course, considered a matrimonial prize—he is very wealthy and from a good old family, you know. To be sure, they thought he was doing well, too, for Edith was also wealthy—and so lovely—and from quite as good a family as the Hydes (though those Hydes do think they have all the blue blood of the nation). And she is clever, too,—she had graduated at Wellesley and then studied at Oxford, and I guess is really quite as bright as Warren—though she is always very modest about her accomplishments. She has only one fault that I know of—she seems to me just a trifle too serious. Well, as I was saying, every one thought she was marry-

ing so well—but lo and behold, for no apparent reason, her mother opposed the engagement awfully, and when Edith wouldn't break it off, Mrs. Prince took to her bed! The fact is, Mrs. Prince must have known something about Warren Hyde's disposition that no one else had ever suspected, since it turned out that just one month after the birth of her baby, Edith was driven to apply for a divorce on the ground of 'cruel and inhuman treatment'—like any common fish-woman! And they had seemed to be so perfectly in love with each other! Every one was dumbfounded—the men about town even more than the women, for they had thought so highly of Warren Hyde's character. As for me, I could not believe it possible when I was first told that Edith Hyde was trying with all her might to get a divorce! For not only is she the most forbearing and gentle person imaginable, but she was always very much opposed to divorces—she is such a loyal Churchwoman. Warren must have behaved terribly to her to have made her do it."

"Perhaps he was intemperate," Nelda suggested, the concentrated gaze of her bright round eyes revealing how keen was the interest which Mrs. Carlton's story had aroused in her.

"Believed in prohibition," affirmed Mrs. Carlton, "and never touched a drop."

"Did he want to be divorced, too?"

"He didn't make the least sign or movement in the matter. Just stood back like a rock and let it go on—whereas Edith seemed perfectly agonized to get it! When Warren was questioned by lawyers and the court, he simply refused to open his mouth. He would make no defence at all. When the divorce was secured, he promptly took himself to Europe, and Edith went home to her mother's. And, now, after three years' absence, he is coming back. Every one is curious to see him, of course, and wonders how Edith will take his coming home. Her mother died just a little while after the divorce; she had been ill a good while before. And Edith has been living at home with her father and her baby ever since. She is an only child and was always so beloved—and it was a great blow to her parents to have her marriage turn out so unhappily. The poor girl was quite crushed and disgraced at first, after the divorce, —she hardly showed her face on the street. But in the past six months, she has been going out in society a good deal and looking better. But I should not wonder if Warren's coming home would give her a terrible setback."

"Maybe they will make it up," said Nelda, "and be united again; don't you think they may?"

"O, no. Edith was so frantic to have the

divorce—she pushed it violently—I am sure nothing could make her live with him again."

"It will be trying, I should think, for them to be living in the same town. Will Mr. Hyde remain here, do you suppose?"

"Yes, he is going to stay. You know my brother Lewis is employed by Warren Hyde as superintendent of the mills that he inherited from his uncle (Warren himself never superintended the business—just devoted himself to study and to writing articles and things) and Lewis has heard from him to the effect that he means to come home and live in his house on High Street—all alone in that great house, where, as we all used to think, he lived so happily with Edith. I should think the place would haunt him!"

"What did he do to her that was 'cruel and inhuman?'" Nelda wonderingly asked; and nothing could so have indicated her utter isolation, socially, as her ignorance of this story which for three years had been town talk and known to the very children on the streets.

"That is what I should like to know!" exclaimed Mrs. Carlton. "No one has the least idea! I don't believe even their lawyers know. I am sure a man never walked that seemed more like a gentleman than Warren Hyde. And yet——" Mrs. Carlton broke off with a

shrug, a lift of her brows, and a spreading of her palms, which implied that her thought was too deep and dark for utterance. Nelda's eyes were fixed on her in a sort of fascination.

"It is a very strange case, isn't it?" she said with a long breath. "I never heard any thing more strange."

"A regular mystery!" Mrs. Carlton declared. "I sometimes think we never shall find out the real truth of the matter."

"The baby lived, didn't it?"

"Yes. A boy. But he is deformed—quite humpbacked!"

"How dreadful!" murmured Nelda.

"Yes, fearful! And Edith and Warren are both so handsome themselves. And to think that their child should be humpbacked!"

"Is she called Mrs. Hyde, or did she take her maiden name?"

"She wanted to take her own name—but on account of her boy, she kept her husband's."

"Is she fond of the boy?" Nelda felt that she was gossiping—and with Mrs. Carlton!—but her interest in the story was vivid.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Edith's nurse told my nurse, that Edith doesn't always seem as fond of him as most mothers are of their children—she seems sometimes to kind of shrink from him. But, as I said, she always was an awfully conscientious girl, and so she does her

duty by him. The child is perfectly cared for —and not altogether by servants, either—Edith sees after him a great deal herself."

"Has Mr. Hyde any family—parents, or brothers and sisters?"

"No. Didn't you know—he was brought up by his bachelor uncle, and when his uncle died, he was left the bulk of his fortune, which, I can tell you, isn't small. He has a lot of cousins and aunts and that kind of thing, in Winchester, but no immediate family. So he will live entirely alone with his servants in his big place at the top of High Street. You know the place, of course? Built in the colonial style, and with all that lovely lawn around the house?"

"Yes."

"The question now is—will either he or Edith marry again? I think myself," she said bluntly, "that my brother Lewis is about as fond of Edith as the law allows! He always did say, any way, that he meant to marry a rich girl—and I don't believe there is a man living who could, with more *nonchalance*, walk into another person's house and hang up his hat to stay!" She broke into a laugh. "And that," she added, "is what I tell Lewis he is planning to do at Edith Prince Hyde's! Of course Edith is very attractive as well as rich —she has recovered her good looks lately; for

a while before and after the divorce, she looked dreadful!"

Nelda made no response as Mrs. Carlton paused. She was wondering if indelicacy could possibly go much further.

"Bishop Osborn is very attentive to Edith, too, you know," Mrs. Carlton continued, "though I suppose the laws of the church will prevent his marrying her. Of course if it were not for that, Lewis could have small hope, with the Bishop for a rival—especially as the Bishop is, comparatively, a newcomer and Lewis is an old story—Edith has known Lewis, of course, all her life, intimately, and newcomers are formidable rivals! Such a lovely young Bishop too! Don't you think he is grand?"

"I never met him," said Nelda, blushing rather unaccountably.

"But you have heard him preach of course?"

"Yes. He seems to me a very ideal man. I never heard stronger, more inspiring sermons than his," she admitted. The Bishop was really one of her few enthusiasms in these days; to hear one of his rare sermons was an episode in her life, and indeed only to pass him on the street was an event nothing short of thrilling!

"My husband says every one in Winchester, especially the girls, worships the Bishop and the Lord 'is not in it!'" Mrs. Carlton laughed.

"O, by the way, don't the Bishop's twins come to your school?"

"Yes, their aunt entered them last month."

"They are very cute children, don't you think they are?"

"Lovely children," Nelda said warmly. "They are so bright and interesting. I am very fond of them."

"Their mother died at their birth. And that same year, the Bishop moved here to Winchester, as our parish had grown to be the largest in the diocese. We were all so glad to have him live here! And his sister, Miss Osborn, is lovely, too. Ever met her?"

"Only when she entered the children in our school. I liked her very much then."

"Every body is wondering," Mrs. Carlton went on, "whom Warren Hyde will want to marry now—that is, if he has not, meanwhile, fallen in love with some foreign beauty."

"I should think the Winchester girls would be a little afraid to risk his 'cruelty and inhumanity,'" Nelda suggested with a faint smile. "You don't seriously think, Mrs. Carlton, that any girl would marry him, do you, when his wife is living?"

"She isn't his wife now. He wouldn't have the least trouble in the world to find some one willing to marry him. Just think of that lovely house of his, and all the valuable property and

mills he owns here—and he is so handsome and fascinating! I think myself," she said laughing again, "that his romantic history makes him all the more interesting. As for the 'cruel and inhuman treatment'—well, what woman doesn't love a tyrant—or even a brute? I tell you, Miss Nelda, those are the qualities that bring a woman to a man's feet!"

"Then why," asked Nelda, "did your friend 'Edith' get a divorce?"

"Heaven knows! Warren must have been a perfect monster to her, or she never would have done it, so gentle and refined as she is! Do you know you have always reminded me of Edith, Miss Nelda, in both looks and manners? You had better take to flirting with Mr. Warren Hyde, when you see him," she added smiling, "he may fall in love with you as desperately as he was once in love with Edith!"

"But I think I prefer a permanent arrangement, Mrs. Carlton, when I enter the 'holy estate.'"

Perhaps he has learned a lesson from his past experience and will do better by his second wife. Well," she suddenly concluded, rising, "what a visit I've made you! My horses will have pawed the bricks out of your gutter if I don't go soon! Good-by. Come to see me," she added lightly as she crossed the threshold. "Oh!" she called back from the step, "don't

close the door—here is my sister's carriage and she is coming in to see you."

She stopped on the pavement, before getting into her own carriage, to speak to her sister, Mrs. Morris; and after a little time, the latter came into the house. Nelda led her into the schoolroom.

Mrs. Morris was tall and thin and looked so like an elongated edition of Mrs. Carlton, that Nelda and Virginia usually spoke of her as "The Sweet-Potato."

"Now, Miss Nelda, you won't like what I've come for!" she said in a voice not less loud and grating than her sister's, as the two sat down on the schoolroom wooden chairs.

Nelda had not the least doubt of the truth of her assertion.

"Poor child!" thought Virginia behind the blackboard; "I ought to go out and help her. The Sweet-Potato is worse than the other one. She is so tall, there are such yards and yards of her—and she bears down so on poor little Nelda! But oh! oh! I can't go out there and talk to her without being impudent to her, and that spoils trade! Nelda is so much more decent and civil than I am with these odious people!"

"I've come to tell you, Miss Nelda, that I'm going to take Maud out of school."

"Has any thing gone wrong, Mrs. Morris?"

Nelda asked quietly, though there was a pained tone in her voice, and her eyes looked strained. To lose a pupil was a blow.

"No, nothing has gone wrong. But I've changed my mind about keeping her in this school. I have decided to send her to Miss Dreppard—her terms are a little lower than yours—and I always do get things cheap when I can! That's only human, isn't it? And we are all human, you know! I'm afraid Maud will make a great fuss about it when I tell her, for she is devoted to you and Miss Chase, and loves to come here. From morning to night she is talking about you! Mr. Morris often says he thinks you must have lovely ways with children to make them so fond of you."

"I shall be very sorry to lose her."

"Yes, I am sorry too, but I think it best to send her to the cheaper school for the present. So what do I owe you, Miss Nelda? Maud has been here just five weeks."

"You have read our circular, haven't you, Mrs. Morris? The tuition is payable quarterly in advance," said Nelda patiently.

"Yes, I know, but it is well, now, that I did not pay it all down at the beginning of the quarter, since I am not going to keep her in school at any rate. Let me see—how long is a quarter?"

"Ten weeks."

"Then I owe you for just half a quarter," said Mrs. Morris, producing her purse. "Five dollars."

"We don't deduct in that way. Maud was entered for the quarter. We never receive pupils for less time than that. You owe me, of course, for the whole quarter."

Mrs. Morris' purse dropped into her lap and she looked at Nelda in surprise. "But Maud has been here only half the quarter! Why I think that unfair—entirely unjust!—to charge for the full quarter!"

Nelda rose promptly. "Have you our bill with you?" she asked.

"The bill you sent me at the beginning of the quarter? Yes, here it is in my purse."

"May I have it please?" Mrs. Morris handed it to her, and she stepped to her desk and signed it.

"There is your receipt for the entire quarter," she said, returning it. "You owe me nothing, Mrs. Morris. Will you send some one for Maud's books and other things?" She continued standing, as though waiting for her visitor to take her leave.

"O, then you make no charge at all for this half-quarter?" Mrs. Morris calmly inquired, keeping her seat. "That doesn't seem business-like, Miss Nelda. You ought to charge for the time Maud was here, you know."

"I made my charge. You objected to it. I will donate the quarter's tuition to you."

But such irony was quite wasted on a woman like Mrs. Morris. Virginia, who with tingling ears was overhearing the interview, realized the uselessness of such reckless throwing away of dollars for the sake of the poor satisfaction of avenging one's insulted pride. She determined to interfere. A few months ago, she would have done as Nelda was doing; but of late she had begun to learn that she must curb her impulses in dealing with patrons and consult her judgment—a lesson which Nelda would probably never learn while she lived. "It does not pay to be proud and have feelings," thought Virginia sadly, as she heard the conversation in the front of the room. "Pride like ours has no market price! As for paying out money at the rate of ten dollars an insult, 'tis an extravagant luxury we can't afford! I'll put a stop to it! We are both too sensitive any way."

She rose from her window-seat and came forward to the front of the room; there was a stately grace in the girl's walk which in Mrs. Morris' eyes, seemed out of place in this poor little schoolroom.

"How do you do, Mrs. Morris," she said, holding out her hand—a firm, well-shapen hand, finely indicative of her forceful character; her

eyes were cold as they met those of her patroness, and her tone was reserved.

"I was just telling your sister, Miss Chase, that I mean to take Maud out of your school and send her to Miss Dreppard, because her terms are a little lower—and of course I don't believe in paying more for a thing than I have to! I came to pay my bill, but Miss Nelda doesn't want to charge me for half a quarter. I think she ought to charge for the time Maud was in school."

"We never make charges in that way," promptly said Virginia. "Maud was entered for the quarter, and we don't deduct except in case of illness. That is clearly stated in our circulars. So of course you owe for the entire quarter."

Nelda stepped back with a look of relief and sat down, leaning her arm wearily on the back of her chair. She was very glad to let Virginia manage the case. Usually, they both gave in proudly to people who disputed their terms, though they knew their charges were, at best, very generously low. But there was something in Virginia's face, just now, which made Nelda sure she meant to "fight it out." "Poor Virginia!" she thought. "What a horrid thing to have to do! I could not do it with Sweet-Potato!"

"But Maud has been here only half the quar-

ter," Mrs. Morris argued with a touch of indignation. "Do you see any justice in my paying for five weeks that she will not be in school?"

"Our rule is the universal custom in good private schools. The best schools in large cities demand a half year's payment in advance. Private schools can't be conducted in any other way; teachers must protect themselves from whimsical or unexpected withdrawing of pupils; they must have some guarantee of an income and some little measure of certainty as to the amounts they can expect to take in quarterly. Don't you see if we did not do this, we should never know at all what our income would be from week to week?"

"O, I suppose it is quite just enough from your standpoint," Mrs. Morris said coldly; "but it certainly isn't just from the standpoint of the parents."

"It is to be regretted that you think so. But I must insist upon full payment."

"Your sister handed me this receipted bill—she was not going to charge me anything for these few weeks."

"I am afraid," said Virginia, smiling, "my sister was not very courteous to you—to offer you charity."

Mrs. Morris flushed angrily.

"O, if *that* is what she meant," she said, bridling, "I didn't take it in! Well!" she con-

cluded in a loud voice, as she rose and opened her purse, "I'll pay it; but I never do pay for what I don't get, so I'll just send Maud here for the rest of the quarter. Of course she will never come to your school after this quarter, neither this year nor next! And if I am asked to recommend you, as I often am, I shall know what to say of your charges!"

"Yes, hereafter I mean to have my terms more distinctly understood by my patrons when they enter their children," Virginia coolly replied. "Eight, nine, ten dollars," she stoically counted, as Mrs. Morris placed the money in her hand. "That's right. Thank you." She laid the money down on the desk, close by, as though it scorched her.

The very plumes in Mrs. Morris' hat quivered with anger as she turned to the door. She scarcely bowed, as the two girls bade her good-afternoon. She closed the door after her with a sharp click; and a moment later they heard her carriage drive away.

CHAPTER II.

"OH! O me!" groaned Virginia with a prolonged sigh, as, when they were at last alone, she stretched herself at full length on a wooden bench against the schoolroom wall. "From all Mrs. Potatoes and Sweet-Potatoes and Carltons and Morrises, good Lord deliver us! How have we ever deserved it?"

"Never mind," said Nelda sitting on a stool at her side. "You 'done noble,' sister!"

"Oh! another, I do believe!" Virginia cried, suddenly starting up as the bell rang again. "The Sweet-Potato has come back with an officer of the law!"

"It is the postman," responded Nelda, going to the door.

"Bless his blue coat! Bring in a good letter from Boston, Miss Nelda!"

She sank back again on her hard couch, clasping her hands under her head.

"Why! it is from the Bishop," said Nelda a little breathlessly as she came back to her stool with a blue envelope in her hand, in one corner of which were printed the words, "The Diocesan House."

"He sends us a check, I suppose," said Vir-

ginia. "It is so much more comfortable to be paid in that way than to have the money handed to one. He is very prompt. I sent the bill only a few days ago (though of course I could quite justly have sent it much sooner, but I refrained) Miss Nelda!" she said abruptly, "you are blushing. Quit it! The Bishop will never return your *grande passion*—he has too much sentiment to fall in love with a woman with whom he traffics! Fancy loving a man from whom one is compelled to receive wages! Impossible!"

"Do call it 'salary'—it is less offensive to my feelings. As for loving the Bishop—I don't. He has never even been introduced to me, more's the pity. Why! See! He has sent you a letter with the check—two whole sheets!"

"Ha!" cried Virginia. "To tell me to discourage your hopes! He has noticed your blushing at sight of him on the street, you poor Imbecile! Read me his letter!"

"The Potato family has a dreadful effect on you, Miss Chase. The Bishop writes a beautiful hand. Well, listen;

"'MY DEAR MISS CHASE:

"'I am compelled to dispute your bill. Your charges are very unjust——'"

The letter dropped to Nelda's lap, the color left her face, even her lips; she looked at Virginia in mute misery.

Virginia closed her eyes, put her hand over them, and did not speak. She lay quite motionless. For a moment there was such silence in the room that the clock ticked audibly.

At last Virginia, without moving, without opening her eyes, murmured a few words;

"This is—too—much! Let us return his check! Let us close our school and take in stairs to scrub! I cannot bear this life another week!"

"I would not have believed it of that Bishop!" said Nelda in a low, sorrowful tone. "And you made such liberal reductions to him on account of his being a clergyman."

"Go on with the letter, dear."

Nelda sighed, and again took up the sheet. But the next words that met her glance caused her tone to change very much.

"'Your charges are very unjust—to yourself. I appreciate your kindness in making the reductions, but I cannot consent to let you rob yourself to such a degree and make me an object of charity! I am afraid you are not business-like—your friends must come to the rescue and protect you from your own too great liberality.

"'I have your printed circular which tells me that your terms are ten dollars a quarter, payable in advance (ridiculously low terms, I consider them, for the superior work you do with the children.) Now my little ones have

been with you four weeks—three weeks of last term and one of this. Therefore it is quite clear that I owe you for two terms—instead of one, as you so generously put it. Also, I object to the reduction on the plea of 'two from a family.' I enclose a check, then, for forty dollars, instead of the fifteen which you charge. There will be no use in your disputing the matter with me—I insist that I will not be the recipient of charity. At any rate, there is no bill which I could more cheerfully pay—money, indeed, is wholly inadequate to measure my indebtedness to you for your loving and wise dealing with my dear little boy and girl. Their improvement with you in every way has seemed to their aunt and me quite phenomenal. Your opinion of their behavior in any particular, has become a new conscience to them. And what is more than any thing besides to me, they love you devotedly and are perfectly happy with you.

"'Very gratefully yours,

"'WILLIAM OSBORN.'"

Again there was silence in the room when Nelda had finished reading. Her face was bright with joy. But Virginia still lay motionless, her hand pressed upon her eyes, and Nelda saw, as she glanced at her, that her chin was quivering sensitively.

Nelda was the first to speak.

"This letter is as good as one of his grand, noble sermons!"

"You may go on adoring him, now, Nelda—even if 'tis unrequited! He is worthy——"

Virginia broke off with a sob. "We are so unused to kindness from any one! I am undone when any one is kind to me!"

"I shall always feel, now, that at least we have one friend in Winchester!" said Nelda. "I believe I really could go to Bishop Osborn for help or advice, if I were in trouble, and not feel in the least afraid of being misunderstood. You will answer his letter, Virginia?"

"Yes, dear, of course."

CHAPTER III.

"COME, Jack, and say your prayers, now, and then I'll tell you a story before I tuck you up!"

"Tell me the stowy first, pwease, Nelda," suggested Jack, the five-year old baby of the household, as he got up from the bear skin on which he had been lying, before an open-grate fire, and came to his sister's side. He was a child of almost ideal beauty, with great, soft gray eyes, curling brown hair which fell to his shoulders, and cheeks which looked like the down of a ripe peach.

The room in which they sat made a very attractive, homelike picture. It was a small parlor, but it served the purpose of a sitting-room, library, and general "living-room," for the little family of four. Even a very fastidious critic would have been compelled to pronounce this unpretentious apartment an expression of unusually refined taste and culture, and as unmistakably belonging to the home of people who had "seen better days." The few fine old portraits by famous artists, the very good copies of ancient works of art in painting and sculpture, the amply-packed book shelves, the

tapestry, old rugs and lace curtains, all pointed to a past, not only of affluence, but of high thinking and living.

Nelda in a low chair before the cheerful open grate, with Jack, in his flannel night-robe, standing at her side; Ernest, a little boy of eight, playing softly on a piano in a corner of the room; and Virginia on a sofa near him, darning stockings, completed the little family group.

"Better say your prayers first, Jack, before you are too sleepy," advised Nelda, as she caressed the brown curls.

"Nelda," said the boy gravely, "I fink I'd better not say any pwayers to-night."

"Why, dear?"

"I fink God can't hear them this night."

"Why not?"

"It's so dark—I was looking out and there isn't any bwightness—not any stars or moon or any fing—so I fink God is away."

"He is in the darkness as well as the light, Jack. We must often talk to Him when we can't see any sign of Him. If we didn't, we should soon not see even the signs of Him, and then we should go always stumbling along in the dark."

"You are talking above his head, Miss Nelda," softly warned Virginia.

"I'm planting seed, sister," quickly retorted

Nelda in a mock-sentimental tone. "They will be stored up as 'remains,' or debris, (or whatever it is that Swedenborg calls them) and bear future fruit."

She turned again to the child; "Come, dear," she said in a low voice, "kneel down now."

Jack knelt and bowed his head over his little clasped hands with an air of piety that was an incongruous contrast to his glib repetition of the Lord's prayer. The contrast became even more incongruous when he came to offer up his original petitions.

"Pwease God, listen to the pwayer I'm going to dictate to you. If it's possible, make me kind to my sisters and brother, and pwease, God, help me find my shinny stick. It was a beaut; I put it under the schoolwoom bench and one of the boys swiped it. God, pwease forgive me for being impydent to Mlle. Sauveur —she's from Paris." (Jack evidently considered that Mlle. was not very well known in Heaven) "But she was impydent to me first, dear God, and I wish Virginia would get another French teacher and——"

"Now, Jack, now," Nelda checked him, feeling sure that the prayer was, at this point, directed to her rather than to Heaven. "Don't abuse poor Mlle. in your prayers. You know you were not good to her to-day; and *you*

ought always to be an especially good boy in school, because you are the teachers' brother, you know."

"You'd better fatten me up for a 'vertisement, like Wackford Sqreers!" ironically suggested this youth of five years; (Nelda had lately been reading "Nicholas Nickleby" aloud to her young brothers as a bedtime treat.)

They all laughed at Jack's retort—even little Ernest at the piano seeming to appreciate it; and of course the laugh put an end to further devotions. Jack, elated with the success of his sally, tried further to entertain the family by telling them how he and Ernest had that afternoon played tying Mademoiselle by her eyelashes to a locomotive and starting it down hill.

"I didn't think you could be so cruel, Jack," said Nelda as he climbed to her lap.

"I'm good now," Jack answered, nestling in her arms with the loving confidence that usually comes to children at the sleepy time. "What stowy are you going to tell me to-night, Nelda?" he asked.

"Shall it be the 'Water Babies?'"

"O yes the 'Water Babies!'" exclaimed Ernest, leaving the piano and coming to the fire. He was a slender, delicate-looking boy, with the large, shadowy eyes of a dreamer, and the prominent brow of a mind too active to be well-balanced by so slight a physique.

"And then, Ernie," said Jack, "you make up some music about it, will you?"

"I'll tell you what would be fun, Jack!" said Ernest. "I'll compose a piece about the 'Water Babies' and dedicate it to you, because it's your favorite story! Won't that be fun?"

"You bet your boots!" cried Jack with enthusiasm. "Will you, Ernie?"

"Now," said Nelda, slipping her arm around Ernest's shoulders as he sat close beside her on the rug, "hear my story, for it is nearly bedtime and you can't be up long."

These two children, though orphans, knew no want of love and indulgence in their little lives. Their sisters had it ever in mind to let them miss none of the tenderness which had blessed their own happy childhood. They guarded them even from their poverty, as much as it was in their power to do. They dressed themselves shabbily that their little brothers might be well-clothed. They denied themselves "necessaries" that they might give the children an occasional treat or pleasure.

But with all their care for their happiness, they were not unwise and they did not spoil them. They loved them too well for that. Ernest and Jack were taught implicit obedience and a respect for their elders which made them unique among children of these latter days.

An hour later—at half-past nine—when the children were asleep in the bedroom adjoining the parlor, the sisters, having put away all work for the night, sat down before their open-grate fire, to talk over some of the many problems which constantly perplexed their young ingenuity.

"I consider it absolutely essential to have Ernest commence to study music with a good teacher," Virginia was saying earnestly, as she lounged in an easy chair with her foot resting on the fender; she spoke softly that her voice might not reach the bedroom beyond. "Such unusual talent as he has ought to have the very best training that we can possibly manage to let him have. There is no doubt about it, Nelda, we must manage, somehow, to let him have lessons with the organist at St. Marks. Professor Dale has studied in Stuttgart, he is an artist, and his kind of playing is the kind Ernest ought to hear constantly, now."

"I know it, Virginia. But how can we ever raise the money? Professor Dale's terms are hopelessly beyond our means."

"O any one's terms are beyond our means for that matter, dear. We can't meet our present expenses, let alone incur new ones. Nevertheless, I say Ernest must study with Dale. The question is, how is it to be managed?"

"Don't you think he could study with me for just one more year?"

"There are strong reasons against it. You are overworked, Nelda. And, as I have said, Ernest is far enough advanced, now, to study with an artist. That child must have a fine musical education. It would be criminal to let him grow up without it. I think he has genius."

"I think so too, but I don't see how it is to be done."

"I have thought of a few devices. You and I must do without new winter coats. We can manufacture capes for ourselves out of those two black silk shawls that were—mother's."

The last word was spoken low. They seldom mentioned her name. The loss of her, five years before, had been a grief which could never heal while they lived, and the thought of her was the deepest sanctity of their lives.

"Then," continued Virginia, "you and I must also dispense with new blankets for our bed. We can freeze at night most economically and genteelly! It is a different matter under the eye of an affluent day—one must have the pride of a sufficient apparel, then, for one naturally expects a lady to be decently covered with respectable, not to say sumptuous, wrappings and——"

"Behave yourself, Miss Chase," Nelda chid her smiling, "and go on."

"Well, we must dismiss Quig. We can do the sweeping and cleaning ourselves every Saturday."

"Quig" was their private name for the charwoman, Mrs. Quigmy, who came once a week to do the rough work of the house.

"And," added Nelda, "the unexpected extra amount which the bishop paid us will help. And we can stop putting out the ironing. You and I can do it at night after the children are in bed."

"Yes."

They were silent for awhile as they gazed into the fire at their feet. The additional tasks they planned to assume were no light trial. Their strong tastes for the higher things of life, for books, for music, for art, had no chance for expression or cultivation in this whirlpool of distasteful work which sapped all their strength of body and spirit.

"Never mind, Nelda," Virginia said presently, in a soothing tone, putting out her strong, beautiful hand and laying it on her sister's small one. "We can stand it—it is for the children, you know. We must look beyond the actual slavery that we hate so, and see the end of it all—and *that* is noble, any way, even if scrubbing and washing dishes is sordid and horrible."

"You and I seem to have given up all thought of happiness for ourselves, Virginia," said Nelda sadly. "We live entirely for the children. Heaven knows we have nothing else to live for. But I sometimes think I can't altogether give over my own life so soon—I am young—only twenty-two—I want experiences! I want to live! I am not content to strangle every natural craving I have, forever and ever!"

There was an unwonted ring of rebellion in the soft tones, and a flash in the dreamy eyes, which told of the buried fire in this young bosom.

"We have no time to live, Nelda, you and I," said Virginia, pensively, in her deep contralto tones. "We must work, work, to keep the wolf from the door. To-morrow, for instance, just think what I have to do; I must be up by six o'clock to open and dust the house (while you get the breakfast). After breakfast, I must give the schoolroom a thorough sweeping, while you get things ready, before school, for our luncheon. Then I teach until noon. After luncheon, help you 'lay things over,' as Quig says, for dinner. Then teach until half-past three. Then give Madamoiselle Sauveur her English lesson. Then sort the clothes from the laundry and do the mending. Then dine and do away with the remains of our dinner. Then sally forth into the night to do

some marketing and shopping. There, my day is planned. I have to adhere rigidly to each hour's task as I have laid it out, or chaos is the result. Not one thing shall I do from early morn till dewy eve, that I want to do. There!" she said, with a sudden change of tone, "I have struck the key of our suffering. We have not enough love for our labor. Of course it is not work we hate, but uncongenial work, and the dead level of gray monotony in our lives, and the absence of an inspiring motive. Still," she added, slowly and thoughtfully, "we do know that, after all, real happiness can't come from without—we have, in our own hearts, all the sources of bliss which the universe can ever give us!"

"Oh, but though the acorn contains in its heart the possibility of an oak," said Nelda, "it can't grow without rich earth and air and sunshine. Give us such helps to growth, and see how we shall expand and blossom!"

"I know that—O don't I know it!" answered Virginia. "And yet, I sometimes wonder, Nelda, if we couldn't make ourselves, by a mighty effort, have some faint affection for horrible things?"

"No 'mighty effort' could make me have an affection for keeping a private school!" vehemently declared Nelda. "I loathe it. Loathe?" she repeated questioningly. "Oh!" she groaned,

leaning far back in her chair and closing her eyes, "is there no stronger word? I am weary, weary, weary of it! I know Winchester needs to be educated—needs it sorely—but I'm not willing that it shall be done at the sacrifice of my young life! I am sick to death of responsibility—I want some one to take care of *me*, and teach me and coddle me!"

"The Bishop?" covertly suggested Virginia.

"Fancy the bliss of it!" acquiesced Nelda recklessly. "Won't some one introduce him to us? Maybe he would think us 'pretty speakers,' as Mrs. Potato Carlton once confided to us was her private opinion of us. 'Because of your Boston accent, you know,' she explained."

"That reminds me, Nelda, we shall suffer for our behavior, this afternoon, with Sweet-Potato. We shall lose pupils."

"I know it. Sometimes I think you and I, Virginia, don't try, as we ought, to see things from another's point of view. We ought not to expect women like Mrs. Carlton and Mrs. Morris to be able to see things as we see them and perhaps it is foolish of us to feel insulted at their brutality in dealing with us. We ought to be less stand-off and more sympathetic."

"I can't be sympathetic with *parvenus*. They grate on every nerve in me. I have much more sympathy with out-and-out slums, for they are

at least picturesque. But there! I shall stop grumbling now. One sunbeam shineth on our pathway and let us be thankful for it—day after to-morrow will be George Washington's birthday and a holiday, and we shall have a few minutes of rest. O George Washington, thank you! If you had accomplished nothing but this, your life would have been worth while!"

"Virginia," Nelda said suddenly, "did you ever hear the story of Mr. Warren Hyde's divorce? Mrs. Carlton was telling me about it this afternoon."

"Yes, I remember the sensation it made—and that no one understood why they were divorced, both of them being eminently respectable citizens and apparently very much in love with each other."

"It was on the ground of——"

"'Cruel and inhuman treatment.' Yes, I overheard Potato telling you. It is a queer business, isn't it? I remember once seeing Mr. Warren Hyde when we first came to Winchester; he was a handsome man; and I remember thinking that some of the articles he wrote for the New York and Philadelphia papers were very brilliant and statesmanlike. I often notice young Mrs. Hyde in church. She has that fine kind of beauty which means good blood and some dignity of character. An interesting woman. How strange it will seem

for her and Mr. Hyde both to be living here in this town where they used to live as husband and wife! He is expected home to-morrow, isn't he?"

"Yes. Bishop Osborn is very attentive to Mrs. Hyde, Mrs. Carlton says. But of course a bishop can't marry a divorced woman."

"I wonder," Virginia speculated, "if Winchester society will lionize Warren Hyde as it used to do four or five years ago when he was an eligible youth. He is eligible, now, you know."

"Mrs. Carlton usually voices social public opinion in Winchester and she looks upon him as a lion."

"If he is invited out much, he will be sure to meet his divorced wife, for the newspapers mention her as going everywhere, now."

"I should think that might be very thrillingly tragic," Nelda said. "But does it occur to you, sister," she primly added, "that our conversation savors of gossip? Suppose we stop discussing our neighbors and let me make you a confession."

"Well?"

"I've answered Another."

"Another advertisement in the Philadelphia *Press?* What for? A housekeeper for an unmarried widower? A nursery governess who speaks all modern tongues, with ease, doesn't

object to doing the washing, and knows her place? Which is it?"

"An old lady in the country wants a companion to read to her and wait upon her. If she paid me well, you could hire a competent servant for the housework and manage the school without me. We just must have more income than that school yields, Virginia."

"I don't think the old lady will meet your requirements, Nelda. Stipulate that she submit her photograph before you accept the position, and insist upon her giving good references."

"But I think it would be a good position," declared Nelda. "Any way, I'm dying for a change of some sort—even if it must be a change for the worse!"

"She wouldn't treat you as an equal. She would patronize you. And you know you couldn't stand that."

"Yes I could—I'm so used to cruelty that I don't mind it—and rather enjoy it!" she added with unaccustomed sarcasm in her sweet voice. "I assure you, Virginia, I could not consider it a hardship to sit and read all day to a dear old lady."

"Her taste in books and yours may differ."

"I have thought of that," Nelda sighed. "Now if she would let me read Ruskin to her, or George Eliot, or Meredith, or something I

liked—but I am almost certain her taste will run to Pansy's works and E. P. Roe's novels."

"Probably she won't answer your letter at all."

"If she doesn't secure my services while she has so good a chance, I shall pity her ignorance and despise her! There is a lot of comfort in that attitude, do you know it? But, Virginia, I've got to have some kind of a 'job!' I've thought," she said speculatively, "of becoming an Evangelist—I've heard there's money in that, and I should like it better than teaching. Or, I'm fond of horses—I might go into the livery-stable business! Either I must have a job, or get married—I'm not particular which. Any man that wants a wife may have me and welcome!"

"My darling maniac, if you are really determined to desert the high calling of pedagogy, then here is a proposition for you. But I am afraid to suggest it—you will fall upon me and slay me, sister! You won't like it."

"Tell me."

"Mrs. Carlton's brother, Lewis Russell, advertises in to-night's paper for an office clerk at the Hyde woolen mills. You know he is employed by Mr. Warren Hyde as the superintendent of them. He will see applicants next Wednesday afternoon. Six dollars a week. I know I'm a brute, Nelda, to mention

it—but it is as good as your companion-to-an-old-lady project. And I think Mr. Russell would give you the position—you remember how attentive he used to be to you when we first came to Winchester, don't you? Called on you, sent you flowers, took you to parties, and so on?"

"O yes," said Nelda, looking amused; "and as soon as we became poor, he scarcely took the trouble to speak to me on the street."

"Poor mercenary creature! Nevertheless, I would rather have you be his clerk, than go away from home. I know I should go stark mad if you deserted me!"

Nelda was silent for a moment. Presently she said, speaking slowly, "Lewis Russell would enjoy it, you know. He would relish snubbing me viciously, because, so to speak, I'm down when he knows I ought to be up. But," she said, meditating, "I can't say that I should suffer at being patronized or snubbed by Lewis Russell. I don't think I should mind."

"I once heard him described as 'a toady to those above him and a tyrant to those below him,'" said Virginia.

"That describes him. Yet let us give Satan his due. He has some good parts. He has a strong personality, there is nothing weak about him. He is good-looking. He has exquisite manners—in public. (In private, I suspect that

he relaxes.) On the whole, I think I shall apply for the position."

"In person?"

"Why not?" said Nelda, but her voice quivered.

"It will be a horrid ordeal for you, Nelda."

"Let us think of the six dollars a week and Ernest's music lessons."

"I wonder," suggested Virginia, "if you would ever meet Mr. Warren Hyde at the office, if you did get the position."

"I have a rather vulgar curiosity to see him. Do you know," she said gravely, "Lewis Russell is just the kind of man I should expect to be employed as superintendent of woolen mills, by a proprietor with a reputation for cruel inhumanity."

"I never knew before, that you had such an opinion of Lewis Russell, Nelda."

"I think I never before took the trouble to form any opinion of him at all."

"Didn't Mrs. Carlton tell you, this afternoon, that her brother was very attentive to young Mrs. Hyde?"

"Yes. Isn't it odd that he should be 'courting' the divorced wife of the man who employs him as superintendent of his works?"

"I wonder if that lovely looking woman ever could bring herself to consider Lewis Russell in the light of a husband?"

"O he is very popular in society here. Mrs. Hyde fell in love *once* with a man who was capable of being 'cruel and inhuman'—she may do it again. I don't believe Mr. Warren Hyde ever was more cold-blooded and relentless than Lewis Russell can be when he tries."

"When did you ever know Lewis Russell to be 'cold-blooded and relentless?'" Virginia asked in surprise.

"Not in any particular case. But I would feel it in the air when I was with him."

"Do you know I had an impression that you rather liked him, when he gallanted you about to parties and theatres and things."

"He fascinated me in an uncanny kind of way. But he made me shudder. I am sure he has something of a Nero in him."

"Nelda," Virginia suddenly said, "if Mr. Warren Hyde should ever chance to see you at those mills (in case you get the position) do you know I think the man would be uncomfortably impressed by your very striking likeness to his wife? You do look remarkably like her, as Mrs. Carlton told you this afternoon."

"I hope Mr. Hyde won't discharge me on the strength of it. Now, Virginia, suppose we go to bed."

CHAPTER IV.

A SUDDEN stillness fell upon the workers in one of the great rooms of "Hyde's Woolen Mills," as the door at the north end opened and a tall familiar form appeared at the threshold.

"Gosh! Here's Superintendent Russell!" nervously whispered a thin, sallow girl at one of the looms, "an' I've broke my spindle! If he sees it, Mag!"

"Hide it, can't you?"

"I can't. An' that 'ud only make him harder on me any way!"

"I wouldn't be you!" consolingly replied she who was called "Mag," as she turned to her own work with redoubled attention and speed.

Mr. Russell came, very slowly, down the long length of the room. His scintillating glance seemed to take in every face, every movement, every detail of the work, as he leisurely passed among the rows of women, girls, and boys. The apprehensive silence that fell like a pall at his approach, the nervous swiftness of the busy hands, the downcast eyes, indicated, pitiably, the abject attitude in which these, his servants, stood to him. He paused, now and then, at the side of some more than ordinarily trembling

girl or woman, quietly watching her, until, unable longer to bear his oppressive presence, the poor thing would blunder awkwardly, or let her hands fall helplessly to her side in an idleness which she knew would bring reproof upon her. The reproof was never angry or loud—but quiet, cold, crushing.

He was a handsome man, many persons thought; large and well-formed, with a splendid breadth of chest, and an indication of latent power in the slow movement of his long limbs and easy swing of his arms. His face was—like his tones and his manner—cold, quiet, strong—but with a harmony of features and coloring that made one's eyes linger upon him with a certain pleasure; a pleasure, however, which was apt to be oddly mixed with repulsion.

The thin, sallow girl with the broken spindle did not escape detection. She was promptly docked in her wages and threatened with dismissal upon a repetition of the accident.

Beyond the weaving-room, was a hall which led to the superintendent's private office. A clock struck ten as he entered it and went to his desk.

There were two people in the room; his type-writer, a stout red-faced young woman, with a much befrizzled *coiffure* and an abundance of ornamentation in the way of jewelry; and

his clerk, a neatly dressed and rather lovely looking girl of twenty-two or thereabouts. They sat at desks on either side of his own; but they did not look up from their work even to bow a "Good-morning," as he came in to his place.

His morning mail kept him silently busy for the space of about twenty minutes; after which, he pushed his pile of letters aside, and slowly turning in his revolving chair, he leaned back comfortably, and let his eyes rest upon the fair young clerk at his side. Her lashes quivered slightly, and he knew that she felt his gaze. But she went steadily on with her writing. A strong contrast she bore to the other girl, who sat at the typewriter. She was plainly and tastefully dressed, and her light hair was arranged simply, in a great loose knot at the back of her head. Her face was markedly refined, sensitive, and intelligent. She was Nelda Chase, and she had been employed by Mr. Lewis Russell for the past two weeks.

"I will look at the work you have done this morning," he said in his hard, clear-cut tones. "Let me have it."

Without looking up, she pointed with the tip of her penholder to the pile of letters on the edge of her desk within his easy reach. Miss Baer, the typewriter, would have picked them up and handed them to him, but Nelda shrank

from the touch of his hand with an instinct which she could not conquer.

He hesitated a moment, before obeying the motion of her pen. The little act was oddly annoying to him. The girl did not recognize her "place," as she ought to do. She should understand that she was not, now, (as she had once been for a few months) an admired and sought-after member of Winchester's select social set, but an employe of his, at six dollars a week. Not but that she was always promptly obedient to his orders and perfectly civil in her manner, but there was a subtle something about her—he could not define it—which made him feel that he did not hold her just where he wanted her and where he held his other employees. He was often vexed at having Miss Baer witness the little scenes between himself and this clerk who without doing aught that he could definitely reprove, yet constantly "held her own" and refused to be brow-beaten.

He presently took up her pile of letters and glanced over them. One of them he selected for condemnation; "Too concise," he briefly said, tossing it to her. "Re-write and expand. I think," he added, "that I shall have to make —will you let me have your attention?" he inserted.

Nelda looked up, and her face flushed as she met his eye.

"I was going to say," he went on, "that I think I shall have to make a rule, for this office, similar to that which obtains among the laborers in the weaving-rooms yonder. I shall have to dock for careless work."

Her color deepened a little, but she looked at him steadily and did not answer.

"The discipline which Mr. Hyde exacts in the other parts of the mills he no doubt wishes to have enforced in this office. So hereafter, I think we shall have to say, that work which must be done over will not be paid for."

His weapon of tyranny with all his employees —clerks and laborers alike—was, and always had been, the name of Mr. Warren Hyde. Whatever there was of severity in the control and management of the mills was attributed to this power behind Mr. Lewis Russell's office; and though the superintendent was feared and disliked by the majority of his employees, he was looked upon as merely the servant of that iceberg of relentless stringency, the proprietor. It was well understood that Hyde, even while across the sea, had regulated every detail in the running of the mills. Not only the working people, but all Winchester, regarded him as an invincibly strict employer.

Such reputation, however, does not, as is well known, usually affect a man's social popularity and Hyde was now, upon his return from

abroad, being fêted, dined, and lionized, by fashionable Winchester—especially by mothers with marriageable daughters—as much as he would permit himself to be. He was the social sensation of the hour; his name was on all lips; schoolgirls, of the romancing age, pointed him out to each other on the street; and his lonely mansion on High Street was gazed upon with an almost sacred respect.

Nelda's clerkship had, in two weeks' time, brought her some knowledge of business devices which had been a painful shock to her young and tender conscience; and chief among these devices, the docking system, as it was carried on in this establishment, seemed to her a base robbery of the poor to enrich the rich. It enabled the employer, she thought, under the guise of imposing just penalties for inferior work, to get perhaps one-seventh of the labor of his whole establishment done without paying for it.

She had never seen Mr. Hyde's face, though every day the young proprietor sat for a few hours in his private office just across the hall from the room in which she wrote; but she had once or twice, in passing his open door, caught glimpses of his dark head and broad shoulders; and the sight had always given her an inward shudder, for he personated to her some gruesomely sombre shades of human nature.

"As for the rest of these letters," Russell resumed, gathering up the pile of epistles he had been examining, "they may be sealed at once and given to the office-boy to mail. Are these all you have written this morning?"

"Yes," said Nelda.

"I expected to find more done. Let me have the letter to Jarvis as soon as possible."

He turned from her and revolved his chair toward the typewriter. His manner with this girl was as strong a contrast to that which he adopted in speaking to Nelda, as was the vulgar appearance and air of Miss Baer, to the quiet dignity of Miss Chase.

"Well, Bruin," he said in a tone that was half patronizing and wholly impertinent, "what have you been doing to-day? Show up! Be quick, now, I've no time to waste on bears or any other animals!"

Miss Baer laughed extravagantly and gratifyingly at his pleasing jocularity, as she produced her typewritten sheets.

"There!" she said, giving them a parting pat when she had put them into his hands. "I've done all you told me to do and am waiting for further orders. I've been working like a slave ever since I came here this morning."

"If your position is too hard for you, you know, Bruin, I think I might possibly be able to secure some one in your place, if I scoured

the country and hired the police force of New York to search me a typewriter in need of a job."

"O, I know there are plenty ready and waiting to take my place the minute I'd quit!" granted Miss Baer with a toss of her head, yet with a note in her voice which suggested the same attitude of servility to the superintendent so painfully obvious in the very atmosphere of the weaving-rooms among the laborers. "But I'm not quitting just yet unless I'm put out!"

"Which you will be, Bruin, whenever your work shall happen to fall short, you know," he responded, as he tossed her papers about on his desk in his rapid and keen examination of them. "There! Write that over!" he ordered, throwing one of her papers back to her. "Two mistakes in grammar. Can't let such a disgraceful thing go out from this office. You will observe what I just said to Miss Chase—you will be docked, after to-day, for work that has to be done over. Let me see you busy, now—both of you," he added, twirling his chair about and including Nelda in his command. "We want no idlers here, you know."

Nelda wondered if it were possible that he really did consider it necessary to goad her on to work in this fashion, or whether he indulged in such pastime merely to gratify his love of making himself obnoxious to those in his service.

"Just touch the bell for the office-boy," he said to her abruptly, as he took up his telegram pad and began to scratch a message upon it.

She rose and crossed the room to the electric bells at the door. This door was half glass and as she touched the button, she caught sight of Mr. Hyde in the hall without, talking with a foreman of one of the rooms. His large figure, in black, almost clerical, garb, was all that she saw, and it occurred to her as she returned to her desk, that it was odd she had never once in all these days caught a glimpse of his face. Being possessed of a very sensitive imagination and having a very human interest in her fellows, the mysterious history and character of this man impressed her fancy vividly and of course with considerable aversion.

The office-boy was rather slow in answering the summons, and when, after five minutes, the little fellow hurried panting into the room, the evidently expected reproof was not withheld.

"Where have you been?" Russell inquired in his tone of quiet coldness, more terrible than violent anger could ever be.

The lad, a puny starved-looking child of ten or eleven years, twisted his cap nervously as he stammered his answer;

"I was sortin' out some papers in the cellar for the foreman of number two an' I didn't hear the bell till Jim Bates come an' tole me."

"I told you last week that when you worked in the cellar, you should leave the door open so that you could hear my bell. If you can't remember what we say to you, we must find means to strengthen your memory."

"I lef' it open but it blowed shut," pleaded the boy.

"We don't want to hear your excuses. You have lost about ten minutes and must be docked ten cents. You were docked yesterday—if you don't watch yourself, you will have no wages at all this week."

The child's chin quivered, but he stood waiting for his orders without answering.

"Go, now, as fast as your legs will carry you, with this telegram and these letters," pointing to those on Nelda's desk, "and be back here in ten minutes or you will be docked again, and perhaps reported to Mr. Hyde."

The office door had scarcely closed after the lad, when Miss Baer broke into a laugh;

"Won't his spindle legs go a'kitin' up the street! I can just see 'em! Because, you know, his father whips him awful whenever he gets docked!"

Russell gave a responsive chuckle of amusement at the humor of the picture; "I know he does. Now attend to your work, will you."

Nelda's heart swelled with indignation and disgust.

"Oh!" she inwardly groaned, as now, in the silence which fell upon the room, all three worked busily at their desks, "this is a dreadful atmosphere to breathe! I feel as if I could not stay here, week after week, with such people!"

The troubled face of the boy hurt her, and she tried to comfort herself with the determination to pay him, out of her own purse, the amount which he would be "docked" during the week.

"It will save him his father's beating any way," she thought, "and make him feel that every man's hand is not against him, poor little fellow!"

The busy morning wore on. When the hour for the noon recess drew near, an incident occurred that, to Nelda's mind, was not without its importance, though it turned out to be a mortifying occasion to her. The proprietor paid a visit to the superintendent's office, bringing with him a New York agent, with whom he wished Russell to discuss some impending negotiations. The three stood just before her desk, while they talked—and now, for the first time, she had a full view of the countenance of Mr. Warren Hyde.

CHAPTER V.

SHE stopped writing, leaned back in her chair, and looked at him. She could do this freely enough, for he seemed entirely absorbed in the business under discussion and did not so much as glance toward her.

Her first feeling, as she examined him, was one of surprise. She had expected to see a face expressing intellect and force, but yet of an inferior and even brutal type. But the man had a high-bred countenance, fine, clear-cut features, and a brow that suggested nobly earnest thought. There was nothing of the business-man in his appearance; he looked, in spite of his robust, virile figure, like a scholar and a man of letters. The stern pallor of his beardless face was enhanced by the jet blackness of his hair. The impression of strength conveyed by the firm mouth and direct glance, seemed confirmed by his fine physique and erect carriage. He was not so handsome as Lewis Russell, but he bore that stamp of culture which only good blood can ever give. There are noblemen, of course, who are without it, but the man who has it, has not acquired, but in-

herited it; because generations of refined living alone can produce it.

But after her first feeling of surprise, Nelda began to think that she could, after all, read into his countenance some of the qualities she knew him to possess. Surely there was something of hardness in the set of the lips, an unrelenting decision in the finely-shapen, large hand which clasped the edge of her desk, an unfathomable light in the deep black eyes, which might contain subtle meaning indeed. She could not be sure that she would just now see in him the possibility of a hard task-master and a "cruel" husband, did she not already know him to be such; but at any rate, his face, form, voice, and bearing, though not what she had expected to see, did not by any means counteract the unpleasant image of him that had formed itself in her mind in the past weeks.

His conversation with Russell and the New York agent, she thought, was very brief and to the point; there was a sort of recklessness in his quick leaping to conclusions, and his determined riding over any obstacles which stood in the way of what he wanted. His suggestions with regard to the matter under debate were characterized by a fling and daring which Nelda realized were very unlike Russell's customary careful cautiousness and calm calculating.

Another thing she noticed with surprise: Mr.

Hyde seemed not nearly so anxious to drive a good bargain as to secure first-class goods. This was so unlike her idea of his principle of conducting his business, that she was quite puzzled to understand it. He was actually refusing emphatically to agree to an arrangement which was clearly to his advantage—accepting, rather, some conditions which would, to be sure, turn out better material from his mills, but which would undoubtedly lower his profits. Could any thing be more——

Nelda's contemplation of this phenomenal state of things was abruptly checked. Russell, observing that she sat without working, suddenly turned toward her with a snap of his fingers which sounded with horrible distinctness in the room.

The quick color flew to her cheeks and a dangerous spark came into her eyes—how dared he snap his fingers almost in her face! A little furious tempest suddenly possessed her—O if only she were a man and could "call him out!" He had insulted her often before—but never in the presence of others, and she felt it unbearable. She realized that Mr. Warren Hyde and the New York agent had both turned to look at her, and the mortification was stinging; her lips trembled; she bit them hard to keep back her angry tears. The cold look of her eyes as they steadily met Russell's, seemed to contra-

dict pathetically the quivering sensitiveness of her sweet, delicate mouth.

"To your work," rapidly spoke Russell's deep voice, scarcely above a whisper, yet audible to all. "Or you will be compelled to stay at noon, you know."

She hesitated; she thought she would rise and leave the office and never come back. But she recalled Ernest's music lesson; and she kept her place.

"I have written all the letters you ordered," she said in her tone of quiet dignity.

"Then go over them and see that they are all right. Don't waste time."

"I have been over them all."

He turned from her abruptly, with a chagrinned sense of defeat in his purpose to "down" her before the proprietor. The momentarily suspended talk of the three men was resumed. But Nelda knew, as she mechanically sorted some papers on her desk, that Mr. Hyde was still looking at her. She felt it with a peculiar vividness; every nerve in her seemed strangely alive to the fact. Suddenly, against her will, she glanced up and met his eyes. Her own fell again almost instantly. He, too, turned away when she looked up at him. Another surprise was given to her in that brief meeting of their glances. The cold, sinister expression which she expected to see

was not there, but a grave, almost kir
scrutiny, which of a sudden sent a thrill a
her nerves like a faint electric shock.

In a few moments, the twelve o'clock ş
sounded through the great building; and
morning was over.

CHAPTER VI.

On the evening of that same day, Nelda was compelled to stay at the office a half hour over time, to finish some extra writing. It was nearly seven o'clock when at length she put on her hat and cape to go. She left Russell seated at his desk, still deep in work. He was very faithful to his employer's interests.

As she stepped into the hall, she saw that the door of Mr. Hyde's room was open, and that he was still within; he was standing before a table strewn with books, pamphlets, and papers, and he was examining a volume which lay open on his palm. The sound of her light step on the bare hall floor made him look up, and at sight of her, he closed the book, and carrying it with him, came at once to the threshold.

"Miss—pardon me, I don't know your name—may I ask you to come in here a minute?"

That off-hand recklessness which had impressed her in the morning, still slightly marked his tone and air as he spoke; yet there was an unobtrusive courtesy in his grave voice which she found an oddly refreshing contrast to the rudeness she was accustomed to from Mr. Russell.

She went into the room, but she experienced

a distinct uneasiness when she saw him carefully close the door; the hinge stuck a little, and he was compelled to slam it to make it shut tight. When he turned to her, the round, young eyes which she fixed upon his face had in them something very like fear. He regarded her curiously, and, with a faint amusement about his stern mouth.

"Will you sit down?" he asked, placing a chair near her.

"No, thank you," she said; she supposed he would probably keep her but a moment.

"I want to ask you a few questions." He tossed his book on the table; Nelda saw that it was a volume of Matthew Arnold's poems. "In a woolen mill office!" she thought with an inward smile.

He leaned against the edge of the table and folded his arms. He was a man whose strong presence made his personality felt peculiarly in every slightest thing that he did or said.

"In the first place, why are you so late getting away from the office?"

"There were some letters that had to go off to-night."

"You receive extra pay for working after six?"

"No." She wondered why he should be making inquiries about things which he himself regulated.

"How many hours a day do you work at your desk, and what salary do you get?"

"I work from eight to six, with an hour's intermission at noon, and I am paid six dollars a week."

He slowly lifted his hand and pushed the heavy black hair out of his eyes.

"Will you tell me your name, please?"

"Miss Chase."

"Apparently, you are a lady," he said with strange bluntness. "Your position here is not very congenial to you?"

She looked uncomfortable, and did not answer at once.

"Is it?" he persisted, bending a keen look upon her.

"No."

"Why do you stay, then?"

She slightly shrugged her shoulders and smiled feebly. "It's not inclination, but necessity that makes me your—eh—chattel!" she said with a little laugh.

"My 'chattel?' Um—m," he said musingly. "My chattel. Yes. Do you have to pay your board out of that six dollars a week—if you don't mind telling me?"

"I have a home," she answered evasively.

"And parents?" he asked.

"No."

She did not like the catechism through which

he was putting her, but she thought that perhaps he had a right to do it. Personal and direct as his questions were, however, they did not, somehow, seem impertinent.

"Where is your home?" was his next inquiry.

"One of your houses, Mr. Hyde—one hundred and sixty East High Street."

"Let me see—what is the rent of that house?"

"Twelve dollars a month."

"A large proportion of your earnings! Why don't you get a better position—something more suitable for you? You are 'educated,' I suppose, as the word goes?"

"I don't know just how 'the word goes,'" she answered, "but I can read and write."

"I know you can read," he quickly said, "for I saw you half smile when you looked at the title of this book," laying his hand on his volume of Matthew Arnold. "Now why did you, may I ask?" he curiously inquired.

"It seemed so incongruous that any one should be reading Matthew Arnold in an office of these woolen mills!"

"I can imagine nothing more incongruous," he promptly assented. "But why?"

"It is inconsistent," she said vaguely.

"But that is only multiplying adjectives!" he objected.

"Well," she answered, "the truth is, to be interested in woolen mills, one must have a prosaic kind of a soul, don't you really think so? And to be interested in Matthew Arnold's poems bespeaks a care for other things than dollars and traffic!"

He looked at her intently.

"I should think," he said, "that you would rather teach, or do something like that, than work in that office yonder."

"My sister and I kept a small private school together—but it did not pay both of us, and she teaches it alone now. It isn't the work here that I dislike. I dislike it less than teaching—but——"

"Yes? What then?"

"The associations," she said, hesitatingly, "are unpleasant."

"What associations?"

Her eyes again fixed themselves upon his face; and their childish innocence and the sweet tones of her voice, as she answered, contrasted oddly with her awful words;

"I hate, loathe, abhor, *despise*, DETEST, Mr. Russell!"

She wondered what it was in the look of his black eyes which could make her say such a thing to him.

"Well," he replied quite seriously, but with a suspicious twitching at the corners of his

mouth, "there is no uncertain ring about *that*! Now," he added, "don't take it unkindly if I ask you to refer me to some one who knows all about you. I have a right, haven't I, to take an interest in my—'chattel?'"

She could not conceal from his scrutiny that his question surprised and disturbed her.

"We know no one in Winchester," she said. "But Mr. Russell can tell you all about us—or any of my sister's patrons—Bishop Osborn, for instance," she impulsively suggested, and then regretted the next instant that she had mentioned him. "Or Mrs. Carlton, or Mrs. McDougal," she hastily added.

"One is enough—Bishop Osborn will do," he responded, seeming to divine from her telltale face that she was sorry she had mentioned the Bishop.

"He doesn't really know us, Mr. Hyde—he never met us—but his children come to my sister's school and he knows about us. But Mrs. Carlton or Mrs. John McDougal or Mrs. Kennedy know us personally and can tell you more about us."

"Thank you."

He drew himself up from the table and glanced at his watch.

"I am keeping you too long—and I see you are tired." He put out his hand; she hesitatingly gave him her own.

"Good-night," he said in a grave, kind tone, as he held her palm for an instant in his firm clasp. "Go home, now, child, and rest."

He opened the door for her and she bade him good-night with a friendliness which a few hours before, she would have thought impossible in her feeling toward him.

"I can imagine," she thought, as she hurried through the darkening streets toward her home, "what a crushing sorrow it must have been to his wife to find him out, for it is easy to understand how a woman could have been deceived in him. Why, in spite of all I know of him, it really seemed while he talked to me, as if he were feeling a very kind, personal interest in me—and of course he was not—for he is a selfish, cruel man."

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Nelda left him, Warren Hyde walked across the hall to the office of the superintendent.

Russell put aside his work at once, and rose to give the proprietor a chair. Hyde anticipated him, however, and helped himself. "Keep your seat, Russell—I want to speak to you," he said with some abruptness.

The two sat down on either side of the desk. Hyde crossed his knees, tilted his chair, and clasped his hands at the back of his neck.

"I have been talking with Miss Chase," he said, as he let his clear, keen gaze rest full upon Russell's face. "You kept her over hours, this evening."

"Yes. It was necessary; I needed her help in getting off some very important letters. That order to Jarvis & Company, you know, and——"

"Yes," interrupted Hyde. "We will grant or assume that she was needed. But I wish her to be paid extra, at the rate of a dollar an hour, when she is kept here after six."

"That is really very unnecessary, Hyde," protested Russell. "She is only too glad to

have the position as it is, and we need not go to any such trouble to keep her. The very woods are full of girls wanting clerkships like hers and she knows it."

"In addition to the extra pay for extra hours," Hyde resumed, as though Russell had not spoken, "her salary must be raised to ten dollars a week."

"I could get a dozen girls at an hour's notice to do what she does, for four dollars a week."

"Also," said Hyde, "she must not be required to come to the office before nine o'clock in the morning. The child is being overworked."

Russell looked at him narrowly and with a shade of knowing suspicion in his eyes; "No use, Hyde," he responded with a laugh; "you can't flirt with her, you know—she's not that kind. She's pretty, I grant you—but you might as well try to flirt with the Venus of Milo!"

"This is Friday," Hyde continued. "To-morrow is pay day. Give her ten dollars to-morrow, and additional payment for the extra hours she has worked this past week. Is she a good clerk?"

"Fairly."

"Let me see some of her work if you have any on hand."

"Here are two letters she wrote this even-

ing," Russell replied, handing them across the desk.

"Her own composition, or at your dictation?"

"Her own—I never dictate to her—I give her the items and she writes the letter."

Hyde ran his eye over one of them rapidly. The other he read more carefully.

"The woods may be full of clerks," he remarked as he replaced them in their envelopes. "But you know quite well, Russell, that an intelligent girl like this is not to be found for the seeking. These letters are remarkably well-written. Indeed," he added with a faint smile, "this second one has quite a literary finish! And they are thoroughly clear and business-like. I will change my mind about her salary. Make it fifteen dollars a week. She must be an immense help to you."

"She is not without her value. But I could easily supply her place for a great deal less than either ten or fifteen dollars a week."

"The ten or fifteen dollars seem to hurt you."

"I think it will make her useless to me, Hyde! She will grow swell-headed on my hands. She is rather humble on six dollars. However," he added submissively, "you are master here, of course. And no doubt you have your motive."

"Yes. I have my motive."

They were silent for a moment. Hyde unclasped his hands from his neck and was about to rise; but Russell checked him with a question;

"Do you think of going to the wedding-anniversary reception, to-night, at Mrs. Kennedy's?"

Something in his tone made Hyde glance at him quickly; "Why?" he asked.

"I thought I would tell you—Edith is to be there. I am going to take her."

"Well?" said Hyde, coldly.

"I thought it might be unpleasant for you to meet her."

"I am impressed with the delicacy of your consideration for my feelings." He rose as he spoke. "On the whole, I think I shall be there."

"Won't the situation be rather deucedly awkward, Hyde?"

A look of anger flashed into Hyde's eyes. But it died out again almost instantly. His answer came in a tone of cool precision; "For you, yes, if you don't hold your impertinent tongue. Don't compel me to the vulgar expedient of taking you by the nape of the neck and dropping you out of this third-story window!"

"I think you might find some difficulty in handling my six feet, one and a half, in that

playful fashion, Hyde; but I meant no offence, old boy! I really only intended to warn you off from an awkward predicament."

Hyde smiled scornfully. His face would have been hard, at this moment, but for a redeeming softness in his eyes.

"Your good intentions do you credit, Russell, though I cannot say as much for your good taste."

He turned without further words, and left the room.

"Well," thought Russell when he was alone, "Edith must have found him the very devil to live with! He is going there to-night, I believe, just to annoy her. Now," he smiled, "I'll take warning from his case—the man that marries Edith must not go *too* far—she wouldn't stand it. If I marry her, I'll know where to stop. Hyde was a fool to drive her to the length of suing for a divorce—she is a tractable woman and could have been perfectly managed without 'cruel, inhuman treatment.' Of course the woman I marry will have to learn that my will is law—but I shall not take Hyde's blundering method of teaching her the fact. He evidently went just a step too far. I'll keep within bounds. I wonder how Hyde did treat her anyway."

He locked his desk for the night and rose to put on his coat and hat.

It occurred to him, as he was walking through the long halls to the front door of the mills, that Nelda Chase's prettiness was very much on the order of Edith Hyde's.

"They are somewhat alike in character, too —the same gentle, sensitive dispositions. I wonder if Hyde is being smitten a second time? But of course no man is going to be fool enough to marry one of those Chase girls—he would have all the rest of the Chase family on his hands to support."

CHAPTER VIII.

"THERE is a young girl living here in Winchester, who reminds me of you, Mrs. Hyde, whenever I see her," remarked the Right Rev. Bishop Osborn to the young woman who sat beside him on a low couch in Mrs. Kennedy's library. It was the night of the reception which celebrated the wooden anniversary of the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. William Kennedy, and every one in Winchester who could possibly be included within the pale of what was technically known as "society," was there. Groups of people were chatting in this library; a few were examining the book shelves, filled with volumes whose leaves were generally uncut, but whose bindings harmonized beautifully with the rugs and wall-paper. A wide doorway, draped with *portières*, opened into the parlor, revealing Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy at the head of the room receiving their guests. At another side of the library, a great arch led into a square hall, and here, too, men and women were grouped and talking; and the noise of their voices made something of a Bedlam. From the distant ballroom at the top of

the house came the sound of the orchestra playing for the dancing.

The couch on which the young bishop sat with Mrs. Hyde, stood apart, in a deep window which opened into a conservatory.

"Who is the girl who looks like me?" Mrs. Hyde inquired. "I shall be curious to see her."

There was a charm in her voice which confirmed the loveliness of her face. She had the ripe look of one who has had large and full experiences of life; who has gone through deep waters, and yet not been undone thereby, but rather made the richer. Though her countenance was serious and thoughtful, it was not hopelessly sad; and there was a very attractive womanliness in her sweet contour.

"Nelda Chase is her name," the bishop answered. "I don't know her (though I send my children to her sister's little school) but I often see her on the street—and I am always struck with her resemblance to you."

The Right Rev. Wilhelm Osborn was a man upon whose face one could not look with neutral or indifferent gaze. There was something instantly impressive in the high serenity and purity of his countenance. He looked like a Francis of Assisi, an Augustine, a St. John the Evangelist; in his deep blue eyes, there was a far, farseeing light that made one feel oneself in the presence of a "prophet of the soul." He

was as beautiful as an angel (though rather homely in form and feature)—and perhaps those of his diocese who were capable of no higher worship than adoration of their bishop, were after all not hopelessly unspiritual.

"I know the Chase girls," Mrs. Hyde remarked. "That is, I know who they are. I met them long ago, when they first came to Winchester, but they forget it, for they never bow to me when I pass them now. I see them in church sometimes. Nelda is the younger and smaller one, isn't she?"

"Yes. The elder—Virginia—is a very noble looking girl," the Bishop said with some earnestness. "Don't you think so?"

"Why didn't you say that of the younger since you tell me I am like her?" protested Mrs. Hyde.

"Miss Virginia Chase is a Hypatia, you are a Madonna. A very nineteenth century kind of a Madonna, to be sure. But it is the Virgin Mary look in your face that makes you resemble Miss Nelda Chase."

A sudden deep color came to Mrs. Hyde's cheeks, but it died away again almost as quickly as it came, and left her very white. The Bishop perceived that for some reason his remark had been an unhappy one. But he continued quietly, as though he had not noticed her emotion:

"I have sometimes found myself preaching half a sermon to Miss Nelda Chase, the look she fastens on me is so sympathetically responsive. That is another thing in which she resembles you—the quick sympathy of her almost amusingly expressive countenance. I suppose a great many people are drawn to make a confidant of you, Mrs. Hyde, isn't it so?"

"Yes, I think it is," she answered, smiling, quite recovered, now, from her momentary agitation. "But what a study you have made of little Nelda Chase! And you say you never met her? But you must have observed her a great deal."

"I was led to do that, you know, from the fact that my boy and girl go to school to her and her sister. The elder sister teaches alone now—I believe Lewis Russell has the other one in his employ in his office. By the way, Lewis is in the ballroom dancing, I suppose, is he?"

"Yes. I would not dance, but I insisted upon his going without me, as I know he likes it. About Nelda Chase—I remember when the Chase family first came here, that Lewis was very attentive to the little one. Virginia was never such a favorite with any one, I think, as Nelda was. People were rather afraid of her. I have always felt interested in those girls—I wish I knew them. They are," she said smil-

ing, "superior types, I fancy! Virginia, especially, looks as if she had brains."

"Yes. Nelda has a dreamy face—a more emotional temperament, I should think. But Virginia is the stronger character, I judge."

"Yes, that is obvious—if appearance means anything."

"Well-added," said the Bishop. "One of the chief lessons that life seems to have to teach us is the untrustworthiness of such appearances."

"But occasionally, our instinctive faith in appearances is confirmed, in spite of all the hard lessons to the contrary which experience has given us. May I tell my Father Confessor," she said gravely, "that his good and true face, from the first day I ever saw it, gave me new faith in God and man—and in myself," she added softly; "in myself, because I knew I could not reverence so much the goodness in you, if there were not still some spark of real life in my own frozen heart. I have wanted to say this to you for a long time—I have wanted you to know that you have done me good, and that I am grateful."

"And I, in my turn," said the Bishop's low voice, "am grateful, for the confidence which makes you speak to me so frankly. It is well for one to be told occasionally that he has been of use, that he has done good to some human life. It

gives one new strength. But what can I say of the debt I owe *you?*" he continued, looking at her gently. "Can a man measure the inspiration he breathes from a rich friendship with a woman of high character and fervent soul?"

"You make me feel very humble," she said, "when you tell me I have done *you* any good. You have always brought out the best in me. You are one of the few men I have known whom a close intimacy has not revealed to be lesser men than my ideal of them."

"Let us never fall into the cynicism," he advised, "of supposing that the idealizing of any one is always necessarily incompatible with close intimacy. The beauty of life would be gone if that were true; and in my own experienee, I have not found it true." He checked himself suddenly, fearing that he might again be touching upon unhappy ground; he changed the subject.

"Has Mr. Morris spoken to you of putting a memorial window in St. Marks—to your mother? He told me he meant to."

But the Bishop was unfortunate to-night; he seemed once more to have struck a painful theme; Mrs. Hyde looked distressed and uneasy.

"Yes," she briefly answered. "I have consented to put in a stained glass window—but it will not be a memorial to Mother."

"May I hear your reason for that?"

"I shall have difficulty in framing a reason," she hastily said. "Apart from a purely personal reason, which I can't explain, I have a feeling about memorial windows—it may be a prejudice. But they seem to me an impertinent egoism. I hardly know why."

"I share your 'prejudice'—if it is a prejudice. A Swedenborgian once told me her reason for objecting to them and I think she expressed my own feeling in the matter. The Church, she said, stands for universal truth, and is the spiritual home of universal humanity; and to obtrude small personalities upon one's religious thought and emotion, is to belie the avowed end and purpose of worship of the Eternal."

"That very nearly defines my own vague impression about it," Mrs. Hyde said. "I am glad to have my haziness cleared away. Do you know," she added, smiling, "Father shocked Mr. Morris by telling him that now the windows were all taken, they would have to put a memorial *transom* over the door for him when he died!"

"Your father is better?" the Bishop inquired with interest. "It was nothing more than a slight attack of the grip that he had?"

"That was all. He is quite well now, thank you."

"And your little boy?"

"It was only a cold. He is well again—or I should not be here," she said in a tone of constraint; the Bishop had often observed that she never seemed able to speak of her son easily or fondly. The one flaw he found in her character which marred her almost perfect spiritual beauty for him, was this unnatural coldness toward her unfortunate child. It was part of the mystery which enveloped her strange divorce from Warren Hyde.

"Bishop," she said with an effort, "I have wanted to talk with you about having my child baptized. I thought if you——"

There was a slight stir among the guests in the library, which seemed to have spread from the room beyond. Without turning his head, the Bishop cast a swift side glance toward the wide doorway which opened from the parlor, and which had been suddenly darkened by two large figures. He saw that Warren Hyde and the reverend rector of St. Marks were stepping into the library.

It seemed a thrilling moment to many persons in that room. Would this distinguished-looking young nabob of the town come face to face with the beautiful woman who had been his wife? Even the Bishop's serene face flushed a little at the possibility. His eyes returned to her face. She had stopped speaking on feeling the slight stir among the guests. Her counte-

nance, now, was pale and her eyelids drooped heavily—yet she looked perfectly calm. As Warren Hyde paused, a few yards from her couch, to shake hands with a group of men and women who had not met him since his return from abroad, she quietly—and as though nothing had occurred to interrupt her—concluded her remark to the Bishop.

"I thought," she said—and her voice though quite controlled was very low—"if you would come to my home and baptize my boy, I would rather have you do it than the rector."

But he saw the convulsive pressure of the hands clasped in her lap, and the white, drawn misery of her lips. A great wave of compassion swept over him. He could not answer her. There, a few paces from her, stood the dark, handsome, powerful man who should have found the joy of his life in cherishing as the apple of his eye, the happiness of this fair woman. And they were together in this room as strangers to each other—and worse.

The library was a large room and very much crowded; and there were enough tactful people present, to cover the open curiosity of the vulgar. Yet there was no one who witnessed the strange situation who did not vividly feel the few intense moments in which Warren Hyde and his divorced wife were in each other's presence.

How did *he* feel it, many wondered? But his pale, stern face, his cold, polished manner, confirmed, to the common mind, every story afloat of his hardness. Only to the more thoughtful did it seem—as it had seemed to Nelda Chase, for a moment that day—that the high breeding and intellectual culture so plainly stamped upon the man's fine countenance, made his reputed heartless tyranny an unaccountable anomaly.

It was a relief to more than the few so intimately concerned, when after a little while, the brother of the host came into the library to take Mr. Hyde to the ballroom. The tension of several hearts seemed to relax with a snap upon the withdrawal of that oppressive presence.

The Bishop took up his talk with the young wife, as neutrally and composedly as it was possible for him to do.

"I shall see you to-morrow (if I may call then?) about the baptism."

She drew in a shivering breath before she could answer him.

"I shall be home all day. Out to everyone but you."

"I will be there, then, at eleven. Ah, here is Lewis Russell," he said, glancing toward the door. "He is coming for you, I am afraid."

"Yes. Will you excuse me? He has come to take me to the billiard-room."

They both rose, and she presently took Russell's offered arm and went away.

It was perhaps an hour later. Mrs. Hyde had pleaded fatigue to Lewis Russell in the billiard-room, and had gone to the dressing-room to be alone for a little while until she should feel better. She had wrapped herself in her long, white cloak and had stepped out upon the piazza which ran around the second story of the house. Standing, now, beside a pillar, and resting her head against it, she was letting the fresh night air blow over her flushed face and cool her beating forehead. The starlight brooding over the quiet night, fell serenely and soothingly upon her spirit—as one is soothed, sometimes, by solemn music, or stately, reverent worship.

"Let me drink it in!" she murmured, her eyes looking dreamy and luminous in the dimness. "I want to absorb something of the peace of this beautiful night! I need it—God knows how I need it!"

She looked like some fair, ethereal thing, as she stood enveloped in her long, snowy robe, her golden head leaning against the dark pillar.

"How mystical it is!" she mused, "the almost sacred stillness of a lovely night like this! How near it draws one to the great quiet of the Infinite Heart!"

An expression of deep sadness came into her face. "But Nature alone seems to find and hold such perfect calm and peace—though it is the secret for which mortals are always, always yearning. Why am I always losing sight of God—and of my own truest self? Why can't I be conscious, in every moment of my life, of the Divine Presence that I feel so truly now?"

She stood for a while, her spirit bathed in this wave of religious emotion, as her body was bathed in the starlight; she did not think, she abandoned herself to her mood.

Standing thus—motionless, silent, absorbed—she did not know how long—she presently became conscious (not suddenly, but quietly conscious) of the fact that she was not alone, that some one had approached her. She had heard no footstep, but she knew, without turning her head to look, that a dark, large form stood near her, on the other side of the pillar. She did not stir nor speak.

The tall figure took a step and came round the pillar. She lifted her face, then, pallid in the moonlight, and agitated:

"It is *you*—Warren? We must not meet here!"

"Why?"

"We may be seen."

"Well? And then?"

"I cannot bear the gossip."

"Rise above it."

"But don't let us uselessly excite it."

She spoke pleadingly, and with a note of dread in her voice; and she shrank from him as though in fear.

"Tell me of the baby," he said, "and then I will go away."

"It was only a cold that he had. He is well again."

"Entirely?"

"I should not have left him to-night, else."

"Then," he said rapidly, "you do have some fondness for the boy?"

She did not answer. He waited an instant. Then he made a slight movement—she started violently, and hastened to speak at once, but in a voice so low and trembling, he had to bend his head to catch it.

"He is the child of our union and—God forgive me, sometimes I almost loathe him!"

Once more there was an instant's silence.

"Perhaps," he said quietly, "that is inevitable." He paused, and then continued, "But you will all the more carefully do what you consider your duty by him, I know—else I should not leave him in your care."

"The law consigned him to me," she half whispered.

"But it would not compel you to keep him, if you would wish to let me have him—as you

would wish," he added confidently, "if I wanted to take him."

"But you don't want to take him?" she asked anxiously.

"No. I consider it better for you to have charge of him—better for him and for—you. Perhaps some day I may think differently. But for the present, you must keep him. I suppose you would not really wish it otherwise, Edith?"

"I want to keep him. Sometimes—when I can forget—I love him as—as other mothers love their children. For after all, he is my child," she said in a tone of hopeless sorrow. "And he is afflicted."

"His deformity—tell me, does it repel you, or does it awaken your compassion and some motherly love?"

"When I think of what caused the deformity——" she stopped, unable to go on.

He made no reply to this, and again they were silent for several moments.

Presently he spoke again abruptly; "I believe you have not yet had him baptized. You will want to have that done?"

"Of course," she answered nervously. "There can't be any objection, can there?"

"Do as you like about it. But—what name will you give him?"

"I meant to write and ask you of that. I thought you might have some wish about it."

"I think we probably agree that under the circumstances, he must not be named after any one."

"Certainly not."

"I leave the rest to you. Name him as you please."

"Then I shall have him baptized just by the name I have always called him—my maiden name. Prince makes a very good first name."

"Prince Hyde. Very well. Have you ever had his photograph taken?"

"No."

"That was a mistake, I think. I have wanted one. Several times I thought I would write you from the other side to send me one, but I considered that I should not be able—*from that distance*—to persuade you to do any thing you might feel strongly disinclined to do. Have it taken, soon, please. If you are sensitive about it, have his nurse take him to the photographer's.".

"Very well," she said submissively.

"When do you propose to have him baptized?"

"Bishop Osborn is coming to see me about it to-morrow."

"You won't have it done in church—in public?"

"How can you ask me? No."

"For it would be bad taste," he added, as he

drew himself up from the piazza railing against which he had been leaning, and stood erect before her. "Good-night," he concluded, putting out his hand, and laying it lightly on her wrist, but an involuntary cry escaped her and she drew back shuddering.

"Edith," he said, in a low, remonstrating voice.

She wavered, as though struggling with her terror of him; but his compelling presence seemed to control her; after an instant she held out her hand to him. He did not take it, however, and she let it drop to her side.

"You need not fear me *now*," spoke his deep tones. "The law has put you beyond the reach of my 'cruel inhumanity!'"

"Don't!" she breathed.

"So why should I find you looking unhappy? Separation from me was what you wanted."

"The light of my life has gone out!"

Again he half raised his hand as though to touch her; but he checked himself.

"And do you suffer nothing, Warren?" she bitterly asked.

He shrugged his shoulders, but he made no other answer.

She lifted her head, and spoke with suppressed intensity; "How could I have gone on living with you, when the deformity of our child,

and my own unconquerable fear of you—and the physical degradation of being your——"

"Hush!"

She was silent instantly, shrinking from him again as though his command were a blow.

He slowly turned away from her. "I will go now—good-night."

Her lips moved, but her reply was a scarcely audible murmur. She remained motionless, where she stood, until his footsteps had died away at the other end of the piazza. Then lifting her head from the pillar, she turned and went swiftly through the long window into the dressing-room.

"What do you think I saw just now, up in the dressing-room?" eagerly whispered Mrs. Carlton to her sister, Mrs. Morris, a few moments later, as she joined her in Mrs. Kennedy's crowded parlor.

"Well? What?"

"Warren Hyde and Edith talking together on the piazza outside the window!"

"Now you didn't!" Mrs. Morris incredulously but curiously returned.

"I did, though. They stood together by the railing talking for about ten minutes—and then he went away—and I saw Edith turn to come in, and then I hurried down!"

"You didn't hear anything they were saying, of course?"

"No. But I could hear their voices the least bit. They hardly looked at each other. Edith held her head down, and Warren stared straight ahead of him."

"Sh—sh!" whispered Mrs. Morris. "Here comes Warren, now! He looks pale, doesn't he? He is coming to say good-night to Mrs. Kennedy."

"He came late and goes early," remarked Mrs. Carlton.

CHAPTER IX.

THE day after Mrs. Kennedy's reception proved to be a phenomenally mild first day of March; and the warm sunshine of the afternoon found Mrs. Gage, Warren Hyde's cousin, sitting with her young and pretty sister-in-law in a summerhouse on her lawn. The unusual mildness had induced such languor that even the light embroidery upon which they had both been working, proved irksome, and they had let it fall into their laps while they lounged in their easy chairs and chatted.

They were discussing Warren Hyde, whom the pretty young sister-in-law (Mrs. Gage's guest from Baltimore) had met, for the first time, at the reception on the previous night.

"I think I never saw a man so lionized," the girl remarked to the elder woman. She had been questioning Mrs. Gage more or less all day about her interesting and mysteriously divorced cousin. "I never saw girls behave with such shameless frankness in their admiration for a man—why, one would have thought he was a prize in a game, their assaults upon him were so open!"

"They will spoil him horribly, I'm afraid,"

Mrs. Gage said. "But how about you, Harriet? Didn't you find him fascinating?"

"Well," replied Harriet, hesitatingly, "yes, rather. He is handsome and large and—he 'has a way with him!' But I couldn't help thinking while I was with him, of some of the bad things I had heard about him. And it seemed so dreadful to have all those girls make such a 'dead set' at him when his wife was actually present in the house!"

"As for the 'bad things' you have heard," Mrs. Gage said earnestly, "I have known Warren since he was a little boy, and I never knew him to be anything but high-minded and honorable. Of course I do know he is horribly firm and determined. But I can't quite credit those wild stories of his 'cruelty' and all that bosh!"

"How do you account, then, for his divorce from that sweet woman? She is so lovely! And any one can see how good she is."

"Yes, Edith is an angel. I could never account for their divorce. Nevertheless, I do believe in Warren and I shall always stand up for him. And he is frightfully learned, you know. I only wish he would come to see me oftener—I could make excellent use of some of that superfluous strength of will and decision with which people credit him—my small son is getting so beyond my control—he needs a man over him, and I just wish I could get Warren to

take him in hand! If Harry is not soon disciplined by some one strong enough to control him, I am afraid he will be ruined. My dear, never marry a naval officer if you want any domestic life and happiness. Just think of having your husband away from you for two years at a stretch as mine is—it is dreadful! And of course the children grow up entirely without a father's control and influence. I really mean to talk to Warren Hyde and ask his advice about my Harry. I have great confidence in his wisdom about such things."

"Bless me!" suddenly cried Harriet Gage. "Talk of the—um—here he is now!"

"Who? Harry?" asked Mrs. Gage, glancing up the path which led to the house. "Why, it is Warren himself! Harriet," in a low, rapid voice, "you made an impression on him last night—he has come to see *you!*"

"It is rather early in the season for this kind of thing, isn't it?" Warren Hyde's voice asked as, lifting his hat, he stepped into the summerhouse. He shook hands with his cousin and Miss Gage, and sat down, as he was bidden, in a chair between them.

"Such weather as this tempts me to come out in one of the Asiatic costumes I've got among my curios," he said as he fanned his face with his hat and ran his fingers through the thick hair on his forehead.

"You have traveled in Asia, haven't you?" Miss Gage asked looking at him with interest.

"Rather considerably," he answered, as he let his eyes move quickly over her figure, from her crown of beautiful hair, to the shapely white hands which toyed with her embroidery, and thence to the daintily-shod foot on the stool before her.

"Are you fond of traveling?" she inquired.

"By freaks. Not as a profession. In the past three years, I've traveled like a book-agent! One is a rather useless member of society when one's only aim in life is to get away from where one happens to be."

"But you can learn so much in traveling," she suggested.

"Of course that depends upon who one is—we get out of a thing what we bring to it, you know. For myself, I am very tired of flitting about the globe—I am anxious to settle and take root somewhere."

"Do you know, I shouldn't think you would choose Winchester for your eternal abiding place, after having seen so much of the world."

"His business is here," explained Mrs. Gage, "and all his relatives. Though as for the latter, Warren, I've just been telling Harriet how severely you let your relatives alone. You hardly ever come to see me. And if you are ambitious to be a useful member of society, I

am sure you would have a good opportunity in helping me manage that obstreperous boy of mine. I don't have a minute's trouble with my little girls—but *Harry!*" and she closed her eyes and turned away her face with a gesture of despair. "He leads me a life! I wish you would take him in hand a bit, Warren."

"Why of course I will," cheerfully returned Hyde. "Just let me know when you happen to want my aid. I think I know how to take a small boy in hand."

"I'm glad I'm not the small boy!" exclaimed Harriet. "You look so cold-bloodedly determined!"

"I am glad, too, that you are not a small boy," he returned, looking at her with a smile.

His face became grave again as he turned to his cousin. "Harry has good stuff in him, Marion," he said. "But he needs discipline, I know. He is at a critical age, and if he is not curbed a little now, he may go all wrong—which would be a sad pity, for he has the making of a man in him."

"I am so relieved to hear that you think so, Warren!"

"He is like all the Hydes—he has a good deal of bulldog English blood in his composition. And at this present stage of his evolution, the bulldog element predominates. He must be dealt with accordingly—as one deals

with a brute, you know. Get that side of the lad under control, and his moral and spiritual faculties will awaken naturally enough."

"I suppose you mean he ought to be thrashed?" Mrs. Gage asked anxiously.

"Something in that line, perhaps."

"I know he ought," the mother said with conviction, but with a troubled look. "I can't help seeing that is what he needs. Indeed, Warren, I often wish I were strong enough to do it sometimes, since his father is always away —for Harry just utterly defies me."

Hyde turned a quick, keen glance upon her. "Do you give me *carte-blanche?*" he asked.

"Well," she said, a little trembling in her voice, "if you won't be too—yes!" she suddenly concluded. "I do give you *carte-blanche.* I know it is better to do it—though of course my heart rebels. Only don't ever *injure* him, Warren."

He laughed easily. "Don't be alarmed. I am too fond of Harry to really damage him, you know. Ah," he added, "here comes the young man now."

A sturdy, handsome boy of thirteen, had come out of a barn at the end of the lawn and was now walking up the path toward the house, armed with fishing tackle.

"Harry!" called his mother in a tone of alarm as she caught sight of the fishing-rod. "Harry! I want you."

"Got to be off, Mamma," the boy called, trudging on stolidly up the path. "Can't stop."

"Harry, I told you you were not to go fishing with those Clayton boys! Harry!" his mother's protesting voice pursued him. "Come here, I want to speak to you."

"I tell you, Mamma, I'll be late if I stop—they're waiting for me," he answered as he walked on past the door of the summer-house. His mother had risen to follow him, but Hyde lifted his hand to stop her.

"O Harry?" he called in a friendly tone. "Hello! Here a minute!"

The boy came back with a bound. He was accustomed to receiving "tips" from his cousin, and their relation was, therefore, very cousinly.

"Hello, Cousin Warren!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know you were here. I'm in an awful hurry, though, for Bill Clayton and Tom are waiting for me, and I'm afraid they'll go without me."

"So am I. You heard your mother say you were not to go? She is going to be obeyed, my lad. Give me your rod and basket."

"No-sir-ee-*bob!*" exclaimed Harry, turning again to the door. "If that's all you wanted, Cousin Warren, you needn't have bothered calling me back."

But he found an impediment in the way of

his passing out; Cousin Warren, who sat just within the doorway, coolly propped his leg across the opening.

"Now, then, Harry, put down your traps and stay at home. You must obey your mother, you know. I'll take you fishing up the Susquehanna in my boat, next Saturday, if you will behave yourself just now, and be a man."

"I'll go with you fast enough, next Saturday. But I'm not going to get left to-day!" And the boy made a dash to jump over Hyde's leg. He was foiled, and his repeated attempts met only with failure. Of course he lost his temper and flew into a rage. He kicked and fought, and the more he realized the futility of his poor, puny efforts, the more furious he became. He raged like a little mad bull, and Hyde soon saw that he had a worse case on his hands than he had had any idea of. He refrained from hurting the child, and took only the defensive—until the boy began to swear with a volley of oaths that might have shocked an old sailor. Mrs. Gage and Harriet turned pale at the dreadful language.

"I suppose you will have to let him go, Warren," the mother almost sobbed. "You make him worse. I never heard him use such words! It is those Clayton boys that teach him such things."

"Harry," said Warren quietly, holding the

boy's arms pinioned behind him and parrying his kicks, "do you see this rain-barrel just outside the summerhouse? Now behave yourself instantly, or I'll duck you in it head first."

"I'd like to see you, you old mackerel-faced——"

Quick as a flash the lad felt himself lifted off his feet; the next moment, his head was under water, and he was wet down to his knees.

When he was deposited again on *terra firma*, his astonishment at such unexpected and utterly unusual decision of treatment, made him for an instant dumb and motionless. But only for an instant. He recovered quickly, and his fury burned afresh.

"Darn you, you darned, big——"

Down he went a second time, head first, into the rain-barrel, and this time he was held there an appreciable period. When he came up, sputtering, choking and wretched, he actually weighed the matter for a second before he broke out again. But the bulldog in him was still unsubdued, and his temper rapidly gathered heat once more.

"I'll let you know!" he screamed, "you darned, damned——"

"Don't duck him again!" piteously exclaimed Harriet, running forward and laying her small hand on Mr. Hyde's big arm. But Mrs. Gage checked her.

"Let him alone, Harriet," she said, looking very white and unhappy. "I know it is for the best."

But even before they had finished speaking, Harry was under once more—and this time he thought his end had come, so long he seemed to be held there.

When again he felt the solid earth beneath him, his gratitude for his safety quite banished his fury; his damp, chill misery took the last spark of spirit out of him; he looked up pleadingly into the face of his persecutor.

Hyde, seeing that he was conquered, laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. "There, my little fellow, it went against my feelings to handle you so—but I believe I've made a man of you, to-day. Just remember after this, when you are minded to disobey your mother, that you will be accountable to me for your capers. And I won't have any nonsense, you know. Now go into the house, my boy, and put on dry clothing."

Harry walked off in complete subjection. Warren looked pale as he sat down again between the two women.

Harriet gazed at him with burning eyes. She hardly knew whether she thought him a brute, or a strong, true, and even tender man. She did know, however, that he made her heart beat a little faster than usual, and that he fascinated

her with a magnetism such as she had never felt before in any man's presence.

"You won't have any more trouble with him, Marion," he said to his cousin, "if you will just make it your rule to mention me to him when he offers to dispute your authority. I shall see that you are obeyed. I shall not have to punish him again."

"How can you know that, Warren?"

"He recognizes his master. He is quite convinced that I mean what I say. He will submit to me cheerfully. I shall not draw the reins very tight, you know. It won't be necessary, for he and I shall be good friends. We shall begin by going together, next Saturday, in my boat up the Susquehanna."

And his prophecy proved quite true.

CHAPTER X.

"HERE, Bruin, sign your name and be gone," said Russell to the typewriter in his office when, on Saturday evening, he had given her a check for the amount of her week's salary; he pushed toward her, on his desk, a large open account book in which he kept receipts; "sign just here," he directed her.

"Well," she said, "please to take that blotter away, so's I can see what I'm signing."

"You are signing a receipt for your week's wages, as you know—be quick and don't keep me waiting."

"Indeed, Mr. Russell, I can't write when anybody's standing over me—I'll sign it while you're making out Miss Chase's check—you haven't given her her check yet."

"Come!" he said peremptorily. "Write!"

She hastened to obey him when he spoke in that tone. In spite of his coarse familiarity with her, she feared him. While she laboriously signed her name (she was much less expert with the pen than with the typewriting machine) he stood with his large hand heavily pressing her shoulder, and as she finished, he playfully pinched her ear.

"There, Bruin, now off with you! Make haste, for I want to have a private interview with Miss Chase."

Nelda had already put on her hat and cloak and was patiently waiting at her desk to be given her check. She started a little at the mention of the "private interview." She felt averse to the idea of a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Lewis Russell.

When she had first begun to work for him, she had found it necessary to let him know that he could not behave toward her with the insolent liberty he used with Miss Baer, and he had never forgiven the fact. Consequently, a private interview with him was a matter of some dread to her.

She saw no escape, however. In a few minutes the door closed upon Miss Baer, and she and the superintendent were alone.

He turned slowly in the revolving chair before his desk, and leaning far back, he stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his vest, and looked at her in silence. She made a pretense of tidying her desk, until he should speak.

"Yesterday, when Mr. Hyde talked to you," he began coldly, after a moment, "did he say anything about increasing your wages?"

"No."

"He has decided to pay you for working after office hours—at the rate of a dollar an hour."

"That is very generous of him," she said in quick surprise. She was in dire need of the additional income which this would bring; and a dollar an hour seemed very high terms for "over time." An impulse of gratitude toward Mr. Hyde struggled with her prejudice against him.

Russell was deliberately silent as to Hyde's order that her regular salary should be increased to fifteen dollars a week.

"You have worked three extra hours this week—so your pay must be nine dollars," he said.

She thought of the winter's coal, and Ernest's music lessons, and "Quig's" wages, and she tried in vain to hide from her face the exultation she felt.

"Also, you need not come to the office, hereafter, until nine o'clock."

Her eyes danced, now, quite gleefully.

"Is that Mr. Hyde's arrangement, too?" she asked.

"I don't care to have you here at the office in the mornings very long before I come," he said, shortly. But Nelda, though naturally gullible, knew that this was an evasion, and that it was surely by the intervention of Mr. Hyde that her lot was being made so much easier; for Mr. Russell had hitherto always been very exacting about her prompt and early arrival in the morning.

"Sign your name here," he now ordered her, producing his receipt book. She noticed, as she took up her pen, that he held the blotter over the upper part of the page, as he had done for Miss Baer, and that she could not see what she was signing; but hers was not a suspicious mind, and it did not occur to her that he might be trying to hide something.

"There is your money," he said, putting a roll of bills into her hand.

Again she started a little in surprise, for he had always heretofore given her an order on a bank for the amount due her.

He closed the receipt book and turned his back upon her as a sign that she was dismissed.

But she did not go at once. She hesitated a moment.

"Pardon me," she said, and waited for him to turn to her; "Mr. Russell?"

"What do you want?" he asked, still with his back to her and his eyes upon some papers.

She deliberately walked around to the other side of his desk, so that she faced him.

"I can't talk to your back, you know," spoke her low voice. "Excuse me for interrupting you, but will you tell me, please, whether Mr. Hyde is in his office now?"

He lifted his head abruptly, and looked at her.

"Why?" he asked.

"I should like to thank him for his kindness."

"He told me to tell you not to annoy him with that kind of thing. He doesn't believe in it, you know, and despises it."

Nelda colored, and turned away at once. That he had sent her such a message, almost counteracted the effect upon her of his generosity.

When she was gone, Russell opened his account book again, and glanced at the bill she had signed. She had put her name to a receipt for eighteen dollars. He had not seen fit to act upon Hyde's orders as to the raising of her regular salary. The nine dollars which she failed to receive furnished the superintendent with cigars during the week which followed.

While on her way home, Nelda happened to see, a short distance ahead of her, on a long quiet street, two figures walking together, who held her rather fascinated gaze as long as they were in sight. They were Bishop Osborn and Mr. Hyde. During nearly five minutes, they walked just a few feet in front of her, and she was rather astonished to notice with what manifest pleasure and eagerness they were talking together. She thought their manner suggested a very intimate acquaintance.

"I wonder if it can be possible that they are friends," she mused. "A strangely mated pair, I should fancy! I suppose their friendship

must have grown out of intellectual congeniality rather than from any sympathy of character. But I don't see how any but a good man could be intimate with Bishop Osborn."

The two men disappeared, presently, in a law office. But it happened that just as Nelda reached the pavement in front of this office, they came forth again. Hyde saw her at once, and flashed a look of keen interest upon her as he and the Bishop lifted their hats. They turned to retrace their steps in the opposite direction from that which she was taking, and so she saw them no more.

They, however, were no sooner out of earshot, than they fell to discussing her.

"Bishop," said Hyde, "do you know that little girl?"

"Miss Nelda Chase? I never met her, but I know who she is, and a good deal of her history."

"I should like to hear what you can tell me."

"She is of good, old New England stock—I know who her family was in Boston. A distinguished race. Distinguished for the best things, you know—learning, piety, culture. She and her sister bear the stamp of their origin, I think—especially the elder, who is really a majestic looking woman. They were brought up in comparative luxury, but their

father's death left them penniless, and worse—for they have to support not only themselves, but their two little brothers. My sister tells me that in addition to earning the support of the family, they do all the housekeeping—have no regular servant—and they were brought up, mark you, in the most refined and easy circumstances. They have shown themselves heroic and capable to a remarkable degree."

"The one we just passed—what did you say her name was?"

"Nelda."

"Her face expresses unusual earnestness—and a peculiarly fine sensitiveness, don't you think so? I fear me 'twas an untoward fate that threw her upon the tender mercies of Lewis Russell."

"But Lewis Russell is held at your tender mercies, Hyde," suggested the Bishop, "and can act only as you permit."

"Yes. I do interfere occasionally with his management. Not much, however. He is a very efficient superintendent, and as I detest business (my tastes, as you know, running in quite another line) I leave things as much as possible in his hands."

The Bishop was silent. Intimately as he was acquainted with Warren Hyde, the character of the man was an anomaly to him. He could not wholly disbelieve the stories afloat of his

hardness in business as well as in his domestic relations; but these stories seemed passing strange in the light of what he had for years known of Hyde's broad intellectual culture and keenly artistic temperament which responded sensitively and ardently to all that was beautiful and noble in art and letters. On his literary and artistic side, Bishop Osborn felt himself in closest touch with him; but the moral nature of his friend he had never been able to read.

"Will you think me impertinent," the Bishop presently remarked, "if I take the liberty of reminding you that it is your duty to know what goes on in the mills which yield you so much wealth; your duty to care somewhat for the welfare of the human creatures whose sordid slavery makes that wealth possible for you."

"That is, of course, true, Bishop," Hyde said gravely. "I feel I have neglected my affairs too long. But I am looking into them now, a bit. I go to the mills every day for a few hours. Russell tells me I have no talent for business. I rather thank God for it! To be interested in traffic—in the gambling-game of hauling in dollars—'tis a poor waste of human life in a universe so full of divine possibilities! Isn't it? However, as you say, it is clearly my duty to know something of the welfare of those who help to create my wealth. I think I am not unmindful of that duty."

Was the man ironical? the Bishop wondered. Surely, if report were true, he was "mindful of that duty" in a way highly disagreeable and unprofitable to his employees.

They had reached a corner of the street, by this time, and now they paused to separate.

"I must stop in here at the rectory a minute," the Bishop said, "and then I have to go down to High Street to call on Miss Chase on a little matter of business; so I suppose I can't get to your house with my Jean Paul Richter before seven."

"That will give us ample time to make an evening of it," said Hyde; "we must read Carlyle's essay on Jean Paul, in connection with our reading of Jean Paul himself. Come as early as you can." And they raised their hats and parted.

CHAPTER XI.

"Is Miss Chase at home?" Bishop Osborn inquired of Mrs. Quigmy, the chore-woman, who answered his ring.

"Yes, sir, just come in; they're both right here in the schoolroom so you might as well go right in there and not bother goin' upstairs to the parlor which I've got it all redd out to sweep," said Mrs. Quigmy, with friendly familiarity.

She threw open the schoolroom door, and the Bishop went in. The room was but dimly lighted from a lamp or candles behind a screen at the farther end. He looked about him, but there was no one present.

"The woman was mistaken—unless they are behind that screen," he thought.

The sound of voices now confirmed this supposition. He was perplexed as to how he should make his presence known. He walked rather heavily across the floor, and sat down on a small desk. Evidently, however, this did not attract attention, for the talking went on quietly. He waited a moment, considering. But his ear was suddenly caught by a remark made by one of the voices.

"Virginia, I've some news for you. Mr. Hyde has told Mr. Russell to pay me a dollar an hour for working after office hours. So this week I bring home nine dollars. What is more, I am not to go to the office in the mornings before nine."

"O *Himmel!* Why he must be a man of some parts after all! However, my dear, I don't like your working after office hours. It is very hard on you, when you have to do so much work here at home. This tedious pile of mending and darning, for instance, after your close confinement in an office all day—it is enough to ruin your health."

"But you have been teaching all day, and that is infinitely harder. The extra hour I shall have in the morning, now, will give me time to relieve you of a good deal of the housework. I declare this three dollars extra, coming so unexpectedly, makes me almost reconciled to my fate, it seems such rare good fortune! I wanted to stop at Mr. Hyde's office and thank him, but—Mr. Russell says he left word that I was 'not to annoy him with that kind of thing!'"

"Which was disgustingly rude of him!" said Virginia's voice, "and quite counteracts his virtuous generosity. Generosity? No, it is the barest justice that he should pay you for working extra hours."

"But giving me that hour of grace in the morning—that was surely disinterested kindness."

"Yes—it certainly has that appearance," granted Virginia; "and heaven knows I am grateful to him for it. Now," she added, "I have a few news for *you*."

The Bishop felt embarrassed in his position of forced eavesdropper. He must make his presence known somehow. He rose, and again walked heavily across the room, pushed a big chair noisily on the bare floor, and came back to his seat.

"Quig seems to be breaking the house down," said Nelda. "What is your news, Virginia?"

"The reverend rector of St. Marks was here to ask me if we could entertain a clergyman or two during the Convocation!"

"Did you ask him if he had lost his reason?" inquired Nelda with sarcasm.

"I think he certainly has taken leave of what little reason he ever had; he suggested with pleasing playfulness that he would send us two young, eligible clergymen with good paying parishes!"

"Tell him he had better send *three*—one of them might not come to any thing, you know."

"I almost derided the man for his colossal stupidity in supposing that we could entertain guests—when I am reduced to wearing my

great-great-grandmother's old lace mantel for a wrap."

"Virginia, I know we are not so young as we once were, but *don't* take to wearing that lace mantel—it seems so like marking an epoch!"

"But we are getting on in years," sighed Virginia, "I snatched up a newspaper for a minute this afternoon, and read the biography of the woman who is president of Wellesley; she is not very much older than I—but I felt myself such an ignoramus before that embodiment of all kinds of lore! And I am morally certain that something great might have been made of *me*, if I'd been caught young and trained! There is no reason why I should not be at least a professor in a woman's college, instead of doing this drivelling primary work and grappling with the puny intellects of Winchester children! No, no, you know I don't mean all that—I love the children, every man-Jack of them—but there are times when the work does seem drivelling. Indeed, I sometimes think if times don't change with us, I'll eat some paris green!"

"But the doctor would save you with a stomach-pump, you know, Miss Chase," said Nelda, mildly.

"It seems too bad, doesn't it, that when one has screwed up enough courage to take poison,

one should be foiled by a low, mean, old stomach-pump!"

"Your language becomes vulgar, sister!"

"I shall be vulgar if I please, sister—I've got to have *some* liberties in this world. But I had another item of news to tell you. The organist of St. Marks brought me a receipt for Ernest's first quarter, and paid quite a call. What fearfully bulgy, pop-eyes he has—I think he must use them as pointers when he teaches! But he is a seemly body, Nelda; he thinks Ernest an infant prodigy, another Paderewski! and the man is a gentleman—you know they are not to be met with often in Winchester—they don't grow them here as a usual thing."

"Make some exceptions to that sweeping generalization—Bishop Osborn and Mr. Hyde, for instance—for Mr. Hyde has at least all the external stamp of a perfect gentleman."

"He is of good family," granted Virginia; "and though he seems to try hard to act as though he were not, I suppose he can't wholly succeed."

"No, not wholly. Now," Nelda added, "I've got to go to the kitchen and put the peas to soak for that soup to-morrow, and then go up to the children. Oh!" she yawned, with a prolonged sigh, "isn't life absurd with its ridiculous pea soups and its idiotic stockings to darn and every thing!"

"Here is Quig," announced Virginia; and the Bishop heard a door open behind the screen, and then a third voice in the dialogue.

"Do you want me to come Sunday night for the wash, Miss Wirginia?"

"Yes, Mrs. Quigmy. Have you finished cleaning the parlor?"

"Yes, miss, and I'm that beat out! Will you lee'-me set down here and rest a spell before I start off?"

"Of course—you must be tired after your hard day's work."

"Yes, I ain't so strong as I was oncet. I often say to Mister.* 'Most people's lives is chores,' I say. I guess your'n ain't no 'xceptions, Miss Wirginia and Miss Nelda, are they?"

"No, I'm afraid not," said Virginia.

"An' it ain't as if you wasn't used to better things. Wasn't it in New York you used to live so grand?"

"We used to live in Boston."

"Boston? Land sakes! How could you ever be content to live so fur away?"

The two girls laughed, and Mrs. Quigmy with evident relish continued her chatting.

"Miss Wirginia, I think it's so queer you keep that broken doll in the parlor."

*Pennsylvania provincialism, by which a woman speaks of her husband.

"Broken doll?" Virginia repeated, questioningly.

"She means the Venus, I suppose," said Nelda.

"That little marble monyment," explained the woman. "I says to Mister, 'Them Chase girls is fine ladies, and I wonder at 'em fur keepin' sich an indecent nekked woman in their parlor.' Why, miss, what do you do when your gent'men friends keep comp'ny with you in that room?"

"We have no 'gentlemen friends' to keep company with us, Mrs. Quigmy."

"Och, go 'long," said Mrs. Quigmy, in playful reproof. "Don't tell *me!* Two sich young, fresh-lookin' ladies is bound to hev some steady company! I often talk to Mister about you an' I tell him how much store I set by you. 'They're young,' I says to him jus' last night, 'they're young, but so wirtuous!'"

"I am glad there is one person in the world to think well of us," said Nelda. "We haven't many friends, you know, Mrs. Quigmy."

"It ain't 'cause you ain't deservin' 'em," returned the woman; and then with the irrelevancy habitual with her class, she abruptly changed the subject;

"I heard from Mrs. Hyde's chambermaid today that she hed that idyut boy of her'n baptized, and thinks I to myself, what's the use of hevin' idyuts baptized—they go to heaven any-

how—all idyuts is saved! But I'm blamed," she added, confidentially, "if I wouldn't ruther hev some sense, and be damned!"

"Mrs. Hyde's child is not an idiot—he is a cripple," Virginia corrected, in a tone that was manifestly meant to check further gossip; but Mrs. Quigmy was not to be daunted.

"Well," said she, "I guess it was a awful shock to the whole Hyde connection, to hev a cripple in the family, and a divorce, and all that—fur they're all that proud! Why I've heerd it sayed that Miss Anne Hyde that lives at 'The Oaks,' when ladies calls to see her, she's that haughty that when they get up to go, she never so much as says, 'What's your hurry?' I jus' guess whenever one of them Hydes dies, the rest of them thinks to their-selves that the angels in heaven will be highly honored at the arrival of a *Hyde!*"

"Who rang the bell a little while ago?" Virginia asked, with evident intent to divert her mind from her gossiping talk.

"The last bell I heerd ring was when his reverence come."

"What! was the rector here again? Why didn't you give us his message?"

"No, not him—why didn't you see the Bishop when he come? Why I sent him right in here and——"

"I thought it was you moving about out

there!" Virginia exclaimed in a suppressed tone. "Is he——"

Bishop Osborn coughed rather distinctly. Instantly a dead silence fell upon the trio behind the screen. A moment—then followed the sound of a door opening, and footsteps retreating.

A brief space longer he waited; and there came forth, at last, Virginia, followed by Mrs. Quigmy bearing a lighted lamp. The latter set the lamp on one of the desks, and hastily retired, while Virginia, moving with her customary stately grace, came across the room with outstretched hand, quite concealing by her easy manner, any embarrassment she may have felt in the awkwardness of the situation.

"This is Miss Chase? Bishop Osborn," he introduced himself.

"I am so sorry to have kept you waiting so long," she said. "Poor Quig—Mrs. Quigmy," she corrected herself, "is a flighty body, and never told me until this minute that you were here. We will go upstairs to the parlor," she added, leading the way. "I hope," she said, as they walked side by side up the narrow stairway, "that you have not contracted some mortal disease from sitting in that cold schoolroom."

It came to the tip of his tongue to remind her that she, too, had been sitting there, but he bethought himself to spare her that. "I was

not conscious of feeling cold," was all he said; but even that had its uncomfortable significance for her. "He was no doubt too much interested in our crazy chatter," she thought, with a moral shudder, "to be conscious of anything besides! And if I am not mistaken, we mentioned *him*—woe's me!—with our usual, exaggerated tone of adoration!"

"What a delightfully cozy room!" the Bishop could not help remarking, as they sat down before the open fire in the parlor, and his eye roved about the tastefully and elegantly appointed little apartment.

"Yes, this is where we keep our Lares, Manes, and Penates—this is where we *live*," said Virginia; and added, "the little real living we can find time for. Here, we shut out the outside world—and try to find ourselves," she said, looking at him with a smile.

A sudden gleam came into the Bishop's deep eyes; he perceived a feast for himself in talking with this girl. Her rich contralto voice, her broad, earnest brow, the beautiful womanliness of her finely developed form, her whole personality in short, impressed his deeper consciousness, and gave him a sense of supreme contentment, as he leaned back in his easy chair and regarded her.

"You 'find yourself?'" he repeated. "That is a needful thing to do occasionally. Perhaps

it would be better if we never quite lost ourselves, eh? But," he added smiling, "salutary as it may be sometimes to 'shut out the outside world,' too much of that will steal human sympathy from our hearts you know. Remember Thomas Carlyle at Craigenputtock."

"But Froude says, doesn't he, Carlyle would never have developed his highest genius except in such solitude? I grant, though, that, as you say, Carlyle did not have much human sympathy—or rather, that what nature had given him of that blessed quality, was nearly killed by his terrible isolation on those mournful Scotch moors."

"I won't quarrel with your isolation, Miss Chase, if you can prove to me that it is developing latent genius in you?"

"I won't attempt to prove that—it would be so difficult to convince you! But my isolation serves a good purpose, nevertheless. It spares me the trial, you know, of moving in what the local papers call 'Winchester society.'"

"Well, now," said the Bishop, "I hardly know how I ought to receive that. At least you would occasionally have the (what shall I say?) of meeting *me* in 'Winchester society.' In your sweeping scorn of that institution, I hope, in view of my situation at this moment, that you make some exceptions, and that the

encounter would not be an exceedingly great trial to you."

"Every cloud has its silver lining! But Bishop," she said, bending an earnest look upon him, "do you enjoy it?"

"Always. Else I should stay at home. Will you therefore be compelled to place me in your category with the rest of Winchester society and mentally pronounce me 'common!'"

"You are not a native, aboriginal Winchestrian."

"But I have said that I enjoyed society here."

"I can't understand that. I think I have, constitutionally, a strong aversion to people who are (to use your word) 'common.'"

"It seems to me," he answered slowly, "that that is a perfectly right feeling for you to have —a dislike for every thing common is the reverse side of a love for what is high. But—if our love for the high is genuine, and not superficial, sha'n't we be able to find in every one the germ, at least, of something high, and by allying ourselves to that, we can have a real and deep sympathy with all whom we meet without in the least departing from our highest ideal."

Virginia did not answer at once. She experienced a sudden shock in the covert rebuke contained in his words. All at once her fine

pride of blood and breeding looked ridiculously small and unworthy, as she beheld, in a quick flash of new insight, the broader, nobler attitude toward his fellow-men which the Bishop held. Her face glowed as she realized his higher, more human ideal, for her nature was swift to respond to any touch of moral truth or beauty.

But Nelda's entrance, at this moment, spared her the necessity of the humble acknowledgment of her error, which she was about to make.

Virginia observed, with secret amusement, that Nelda had carefully made her toilet before appearing—which toilet, since she owned but one gown, consisted only in "doing up" her hair in its most becoming and effective style.

"It is time I stated the object of my visit," the Bishop said, when they had all sat down. "I have come to ask a great favor of you. My sister is going to New York for a few weeks at Easter, and as I know you have too weeks' vacation at that time, I want to suggest that you let me pack you all off (your whole household, I mean) with my two children, to the seaside for those few weeks. The change will be a fine thing for the children—yours and mine too—and it won't hurt you either. You know my little girl is rather delicate, and really needs the sea air. I know of no one with whom I would

be willing to send the children except you. I shall engage comfortable rooms for you at a hotel at Long Branch, and I am sure you will all be the better for the spree. What do you say to it? May I have my way?"

"The obligation would be so overwhelmingly on our side," began Virginia, but he stopped her.

"Not in the least. I have said I knew of no one else with whom I would be willing to send Jeannie and Willie. Either they go with you, or I fear they stay at home. I shall be very much disappointed if I can't send them with you. The fact is," he added, including both Nelda and Virginia in his glance, "I like to have the children with you as much as possible."

"You are very kind to say that," said Virginia, coloring a little. "I shall be very glad to go, then—but indeed, Bishop, it would be an imposition upon your kindness, if I should take my entire household with me to help take care of Jeannie and Willie!"

"You can't very well go without taking the others with you. One of you can hardly be spared from home unless all go, is that not so?"

"I could manage alone with Ernest and Jack for a few weeks," said Nelda. "It is very kind of you, Bishop, to plan such a pleasure for us all—but," she added with an evidently painful effort, "as I could not at any rate get away

from the office at the Hyde woolen mills, I may as well keep our two children at home with me; for I agree with Virginia that it would be an imposition on your kindness for more than one of us to go. I shall be delighted, though, for Virginia to have such an outing; it will do her no end of good."

It was a trial to Nelda's sensitive, and perhaps false, pride to be compelled to speak of her humble employment at the mills.

"How could you possibly manage, Miss Nelda, to keep house, take care of Jack and Ernest, and at the same time go to the office every day? Impossible!"

"O, nothing is impossible for us to do!" Nelda answered, laughing. "We found that out long ago!"

"It is not impossible, either, for you to be overtaken with nervous prostration. No, no, you must not disappoint me—you must all go to Long Branch for two weeks. As to your getting away from the mills, can't you manage that?"

"I am sure Mr. Russell could not spare me."

"We shall see. If you can't persuade him, I think I can. At any rate, we have a long while to think about it—several months, you know. You promise me that I may count on you, don't you?"

The promise was given, Nelda stipulating, of

course, that she must obtain Mr. Russell's consent.

"Or Mr. Hyde's?" the Bishop suggested. "Why not apply to headquarters? Who of the two would be more likely to grant you the favor?"

"I see almost nothing of Mr. Hyde, and I don't really know him. I have never talked to him but once since I've been employed in his mills. It is Mr. Russell that employs me and I write for him, so I am sure it is of him I ought to ask permission to go."

"As you think best, of course. But I am half inclined to believe—well," he abruptly checked himself, "I don't know much about the matter and so won't attempt to advise you."

He turned to Virginia with an abrupt change of the subject;

"Do my boy and girl lead you a life of it?"

"They try to sometimes."

"Of course. But I believe they are not wholly depraved, are they, despite the fact that they are the children of a bishop?"

"By no means. Indeed, at times they are so good that one would hardly suspect their clerical parentage. I must tell you," she added, "a story about Jeannie. She came into school yesterday morning, and told me, 'I saw a big dog on a pavement, and I was afraid of him, so I thought I would go on the other side of the

street. But then I changed my mind and 'cided I'd 'custom myself to be brave—so I shut my eyes tight, and walked right straight across that pavement—and all the time I kept thinking hard!' 'What did you keep thinking?' I asked her, and she said, 'I just kept thinking hard, God will take care of me!'"

"Bless the child!" said the bishop. "She is very religiously inclined," he added, smiling.

"Yes, I notice that. But think of the resolution she showed in resisting the temptation to cross the street!"

"In order to 'custom herself to be brave,'" he repeated. "Yes, the story pleases me."

They were silent for a moment.

"I suppose, Bishop," Virginia presently said, speaking earnestly, "it has become a commonplace to you to be told by grateful disciples that you have been an inspiration in their lives to help them over hard places?"

"Such messages can never come to me as commonplaces, Miss Chase."

"Of course, I know they could not," she contradicted herself, "and that is why I want to frankly tell you what you have done for me."

She hesitated an instant. He looked and waited with grave interest.

"When I first heard you preach, I was in that frightful transition state that all earnest people have got to pass through on their way

from childish acceptance of traditions to a living faith. I had become very sceptical; I thought I had gotten rid of all barriers, and had come out into freedom. But I realized that it was a freedom dearly purchased. For with the downfall of the barriers, came also the falling away of all supports and all guidance. I seemed to be without a compass on a vast bewildering sea. But you came," she said, with a faint smile. "And you saved me from my scepticism because I saw that though you rejected traditions, as I did, yet you found this not incompatible with a very living faith in the Founder of Christianity; and not incompatible, either, with a most spiritual and earnest religious life."

"My work in the Church," he answered, "seems to be more especially with those who, like you, have broken away from the old landmarks and have become stranded helplessly on materialistic unbelief. For such, I find I have a message."

"And their number increases constantly," Virginia said. "If an occasional vital teacher like you did not come to the rescue, what a sorry groping they would have in searching their way."

"They would never find their way in the Church through the ministry of the average tradition-bound clergyman," he answered, sadly.

"They might find light on their path through Ruskin, or Carlyle, or Emerson, or Matthew Arnold, or others who separated themselves entirely from the external Church."

It was characteristic of Nelda that she took no part in this discussion. She was a little chary of her sister's religious attitude; she feared it bordered on irreverent rejection of that which their parents and ancestors had honored and loved. Speculation of any sort was distasteful to her. She could be reached only on the side of her ardent imagination and passionate affections.

Her silence led, soon, to a change of subject. Some pictures in the room were commented upon—a painting by Millet, one by Theodore Robinson, Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, and others; the school of impressionism was discussed, and some rare books were also chatted about. And this latter recalled the Bishop, with a start, to his engagement with Warren Hyde, to spend the evening in reading Jean Paul.

When he came to himself and remembered, it was long past the hour appointed for their meeting at Hyde's house. In his unusually strong interest in his talk with these bright girls, he had quite forgotten himself.

He was compelled to make his adieus rather hastily, as he explained his reason for his despatch.

"Hyde is probably waiting for me now in his library in no amiable mood, I fancy," he said, as he shook hands with them at the drawing-room door.

Late that night, as Nelda lay on her bed, with eyes very wide open, she decided that the fact of Mr. Hyde's friendship with the Bishop, added to his kindness in shortening her hours, and paying her for extra work, together served to modify, greatly, the sombreness of the image of him which had lived in her fancy hitherto.

CHAPTER XII.

Two weeks had passed by and it was Saturday again; Nelda and the typewriter were lingering in Russell's office, after the close of the day's work, to receive their week's salary.

They had both already put on their wraps, and now only waited the pleasure of their paymaster before leaving the office to go home.

He took his time, as was his wont, to come to the point of attending to them. He had been leaning back in his desk chair reading a newspaper, and he leisurely finished the article he was upon, before he turned to them.

He invariably waited upon Miss Baer first. Nelda set herself to observe, just now, whether he paid the typewriter in the form of a check, or with dollars and cents, which latter he had of late been giving her. The sudden change he had made in his method of paying her, impressed her as peculiar, though she hardly knew why.

"There, Bruin, sign your name," he said to Miss Baer as at last he threw open his record book and pushed it toward her. Nelda saw him, then, take up his check book and fill out an order.

"Now," he said, as Miss Baer rose from bending over his desk, "take your check and good-night. There, there," he added, as she picked it up and looked at it; "you need not examine it so closely—it is a great deal more than you deserve. Off with you, now, my girl, or I'll dock you for wasting my time!"

"I wouldn't put it past you!" she retorted, half playfully, half pouting.

He threw back his head with a roar of laughter; "You know me too well, eh Bruin, to doubt that I'd do it? I've taught you to know me too well, not to believe me quite equal to such little jokes, have I? Well, now, go quick!" with a snap of his finger; "or I'll take back that check in a wink and make you out another!"

Evidently, she believed him, for her retreat from the room was ignominiously hasty.

It always gave Nelda what Mrs. Quigmy would have named "a queer turn," to find herself closeted alone with this man. She schooled herself, just now, with an effort, as she stood before him, to bear whatever was before her. Even though it might possibly be an increase of salary, his method of conveying the fact to her would be annoying and hard to endure.

To her surprise, however, no sooner were they alone than instead of attending to her case, he deliberately turned his back upon her and took

up his newspaper again. He propped his feet on the top of his desk and softly whistled as his eye roved over the long columns.

What could this strange behavior portend? Why did he not pay her? She stood quietly and waited, thinking what a handsome animal he was with his splendid broad back, his abundant blond hair, his strong physical virility.

But he read on, ignoring her completely. Becoming tired from standing, she took a step to a chair and sat down. Still he did not notice her. Suddenly, like a flash, a passionate anger possessed her. She sprang to her feet and confronted him. An imperious stamp of her small foot made his paper drop to his knee, and his eyes meet hers. A startling little figure she made as she stood before him, her face flushed, her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving tremulously. Russell could not quite conceal from his face the surprise and amusement he felt as he looked at her. "Who would have supposed the little thing had such a devil in her?" was his thought, and he had to bite his lip hard to keep back the laugh which rose to his throat.

"Well?" he coldly inquired. "What are you waiting for?"

The sound of his voice brought her to herself. The passion died out of her face as quickly as it had come there, and left her pale

as death. The light faded from her eyes, the hands tensely clasped at her waist, fell to her side. She looked at him dully.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"My money."

"There is none due you."

"My week's salary, Mr. Russell?"

"There is no money due you. On the contrary, you are in debt to the house."

"Will you explain to me how?"

"With pleasure. Mr. Hyde's house agent, Mr. Doebler, informed me last night that you were owing some rent. You paid but five dollars rent for the coming month, instead of twelve. Therefore, as your wages this week would have been only six dollars, you owe the house one dollar. Had there been any after hours' work for you this week, you might have made up the other dollar—and even perhaps some over. As it is, I trust you see clearly that nothing is due you."

"Mr. Doebler assured my sister, yesterday afternoon, that he was perfectly willing to wait until the middle of the month, especially as we had never before, in three years, asked him to indulge us with a day's grace. Is it possible that he complained to you of our not paying promptly this once?"

"I see no advantage in discussing the matter with you," Russell replied. "I act under Mr.

Hyde's orders, you understand. As the case stands, you owe the house one dollar."

He lifted his newspaper from his knee and turned his eyes to it.

Nelda hesitated. It was a grievous disappointment to her not to receive her salary. For a week they had been entirely without funds at home, and it had been a week of such straits and difficulties that it had taken all their fortitude to bear it with patience. Virginia had been prevented from sending an important letter to Boston because she had not two cents to buy a stamp. Nelda had been unable to get some medicine for a severe cold, because she had no money to pay for it. Fortunately they could command credit for meat and groceries, and so had staved off starvation. But they had looked forward to Nelda's six dollars which would come to them on Saturday night, as to a great fortune.

"Mr. Russell," she said, after a moment, "Mr. Doebler's little son goes to my sister's school. For six weeks, Mr. Doebler has owed ten dollars tuition. Let that be counted for our house rent—and please let me have my money to-night."

He had not looked up from his paper while she spoke, and now, as he carelessly answered, he still kept his eyes upon the sheet;

"The house has nothing whatever to do with

Mr. Doebler's little son and your sister's school, you know. Those matters are your affair, I suppose—certainly they are no concern of Mr. Hyde's or mine."

"Very well, then," Nelda quietly answered, "I will take a receipt, if you please, for the six dollars house rent."

At that, he looked at her quickly enough.

"That isn't necessary," he said. "I shall settle with Doebler and make it all right."

"But I wish to have a receipt."

"Doebler will give you a receipt next time you go to him. It is not my business to be giving rent receipts—I am not Mr. Hyde's house agent."

"Then how can it be your business to collect rents?"

He eyed her keenly. The little thing had more resolution than he had credited her with. Perhaps it would be just as well not to push her too close to the wall.

He gave a short laugh as he flung down his paper and took up his account book.

"You won't be satisfied without a receipt? Then sign here for your week's wages, and I'll give you a receipt for the rent."

This was done. And then, with a heavy heart, Nelda left the office to go home, burdened sorely with the necessity before her of telling Virginia that she came empty-handed.

As she walked through the street, she passed Mr. Hyde driving in a fine turn-out, with liveried coachman and footman, and beautiful horses; and Bishop Osborn was at his side.

Could it be, she wondered with a sharp pang, that perhaps Bishop Osborn was insincere in his seeming goodness—else how could he be on such intimate and friendly terms with an oppressor of the poor like Mr. Warren Hyde?

But she put the uncharitable thought from her as unworthy.

"O, I hope I am not becoming bitter from our misfortunes!" she sighed, and a tear rolled over her cheek. "I do feel so discouraged to-night!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"My arms is givin' out," timidly suggested the thin, hungry-looking little office-boy, as a workman, under Russell's directions, laid on the child's outstretched arms two large bundles of material done up in heavy paper. "One bundle's as much as I kin carry, Mr. Russell."

"No complaining, sir—hurry off, now, quickly, and be back for more."

The child, for the last half hour, had been trudging up and downstairs between the superintendent's office and "Room Number Three," laden at each trip with two heavy rolls of goods taken from a large pile which the morning's express had brought to the mills.

Nelda, from her desk, had noticed that the boy was being overstrained, and that his face was becoming drawn with exhaustion. When she heard him feebly protest that he could carry but one bundle at a time, she knew that his suffering must be severe, if it could make him open his mouth to complain to the superintendent, for the child feared Mr. Russell in every nerve of his small body.

"Please, mister, kin I go on the elevator?" the little fellow ventured to ask; but Russell

almost annihilated him with a look, at this bold request; for the privilege of using the elevator was forbidden to all the working hands and granted only to the officers and higher clerks.

Nelda watched the boy anxiously as he was compelled to go forth again, bearing his too heavy burden.

The interval, this time, between his leaving the office and returning, was longer than it had been at all before, and it gave the superintendent time to become impatient with the consequent delay in despatching the work on hand.

"Now, sir," spoke his cold tones, as he again loaded down the puny arms, "make up on this trip the time you lost on the last one—or you and I will have a little reckoning. Do you understand?"

No answer; but Nelda noticed a tear roll over the boy's pale face. She could scarcely restrain her impulse to jump up and help him, as she saw him labor away once more.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Russell," respectfully suggested the workman, who was moving and marking the goods, "I'm afraid one bundle is as much as the kid oughter carry at a time. He don't look overly strong."

"Are you running this job, Bryce, or am I? Attend to your work."

He turned from Bryce to speak to Nelda. "Just go downstairs to number three with

notebook and pencil and take an inventory of the stock on hand there. Don't be long, for I shall need you here."

She left the room at once, glad of this chance to overtake the office-boy and relieve him of one of his bundles.

But at a landing in the long stairway which led down to number three, she was brought to a halt by an obstruction directly below her. Mr. Hyde coming upstairs, had, just at the moment of her appearing, met the boy going down with his wares, and had stopped him. She was compelled to wait, as the stairway was not wide enough for her to pass; and Mr. Hyde, intent upon the boy, did not seem to notice her standing above him.

"What does this mean, my lad?" he asked, frowning, but speaking in a tone of gentleness, as he stooped at once to take the heavy rolls from the child's arms. "This is too heavy for you."

The boy had been taught to fear the very name of Mr. Hyde, and he quite misunderstood that magnate's interference just now. His thin arms hung limply at his side, as he lifted his eyes in a kind of dumb misery to the proprietor's face.

"If I ain't no good at carryin' sich heavy things, mister, I kin run errands awful quick, an' please don't d'scharge me!"

Hyde deposited the goods on the step, and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Who gave you these bundles to carry?"

"Mr. Russell."

"Um—m," Hyde nodded. "Yes. Have you been carrying any others?"

"Yes, sir, I kerried a whole lot of 'em—I *kin* carry 'em, Mister Hyde. On'y—on'y it makes my arms and legs trembly. But I kin do it, 'deed I kin."

"You have done enough for to-day, my boy. I have something else for you to do now."

He took one of the brown, rough hands of the child in his own white, smooth one and looked at the bruises on his bare arms made by the ropes which bound the bundles.

"I want you to take this dollar," laying a note in the small palm, "go to Haverstick's drug store at the corner, and ask for some ointment for these poor little sticks," touching the thin arms. "Keep the change—get some soda water with it, if you want to."

The child's fingers did not close over the money. He gazed up into Mr. Hyde's face in incredulous wonder.

"Are you guyin' me, Mr. Hyde?" he asked, doubtfully.

"No, my lad, no—the money is yours—take it and do as I've told you."

"But—but," the boy stammered, his cheeks

suddenly growing red, and a spark of animation coming into his dreary young eyes, "but what'll Mr. Russell say? He's waitin' fur me to carry more bundles."

"Yes. I'll attend to that. When you come back, come to my office. Do you know what I've got for you there? A ticket for the circus this afternoon. You may have a half holiday."

"But won't I be docked?" came the breathless, eager inquiry.

"Docked?" Hyde asked vaguely. "No; of course, no. Now then, do you believe I mean what I say?" he asked, putting his fingers under the little fellow's chin and lifting his face toward his own.

"Yes, sir," the child answered, his countenance glowing. "But I didn't know you was like this here, Mr. Hyde—I thought you was diff'runt."

"What did you think I was like?" Hyde curiously asked.

"I thought you was like Mr. Russell—only worser."

"And how is Mr. Russell?"

"He don't want a cove to have no larks, and he's always a' dockin' wages and—he don't like a feller! But you're diff'runt!"

Hyde stooped and picked up the bundles.

"There now, child," he said, making space

for the boy to pass him, "go and get your medicine and then come back to my office."

"Are *you* goin' to carry down my bundles?" anxiously inquired the urchin, evidently impressed with the unfitness of such an act on the part of the proprietor.

"Yes. Step ahead, little fellow, and hurry away."

The child went past him and ran downstairs with a nimbleness in his movements which made him look as if a new life had suddenly sprung up in his frail body.

Hyde followed slowly with the goods. He had not appeared to notice Nelda standing on the landing, and her light step behind him, now, did not attract his attention. When they reached number three, she set about her work at once with her notebook and pencil. But while she was busy, her eyes and ears were, nevertheless, very much alive to Mr. Hyde's presence in the room.

"Guttermuth," she heard him say to a stalwart laborer, "will you go up to Mr. Russell's office and tell him I sent you to help carry down the bundles of goods? Tell him I sent his office-boy away for the day."

"Yes, sir," Guttermuth answered, doffing his cap and disappearing at once.

Hyde left the room, then, and Nelda saw him no more during the morning. But she pon-

dered many things in her heart in the course of that day.

It was late in the afternoon when she happened again to see him for a moment. In writing some important letters, she found that she required an address which Mr. Russell had forgotten to give her, of a New York business firm; and as he had now gone out, she decided that she would have to go to Mr. Hyde's office to consult the New York directory which she knew lay on his desk.

She hoped Mr. Hyde would not be there; she rather shrank from the idea of intruding upon him in his office, but she saw no way out of it.

He was there, however. In answer to her knock, his voice called "Come!" and when she stepped into the room, she found him stretched at full length on a leather couch by the window, holding a book which he was reading with a frowning interest. It was evidently with reluctance that he lifted his eyes from the page, to see who was his visitor. But at sight of her, he jumped up with alacrity, and hastily smoothed his tumbled black hair.

"Pardon me, Miss Chase—I thought it was Russell," he said, coming forward and holding out his hand; he held his book with his forefinger inserted in the place at which he had been reading. She gave him her own hand a

little hesitatingly. She had grown so accustomed to Mr. Russell's discourtesy toward her and she so identified Mr. Hyde with him, that she found herself almost as sceptical of the proprietor's courtesy, as the little office-boy had been of his kindness and generosity that morning.

"I am sorry to disturb you," she said, "but may I see your New York directory for a minute?"

He wheeled a chair to the table and drew the directory forward. "Don't apologize—you have not 'disturbed' me in the least. Will you sit down?"

"Thank you," she said, as she took the chair.

He seated himself opposite her at the table, and again opened his book. He sat sidewise, with his elbow on the arm of his chair and his forehead resting on the tips of his fingers, so that his face was half hidden from her.

It took her some minutes to find the address she wanted. When she had finally copied it and had closed the book, she made a movement to rise; but without turning his head, and apparently without seeing her slight movement, he checked her with a question; and she sat still.

"Do you read Browning, Miss Chase?"

"Yes."

He turned and looked at her where she sat. He had expected another reply. An office

clerk who read Browning, and also, as he remembered, Matthew Arnold—even though she were a gentlewoman in reduced circumstances —was a bit of a phenomenon.

"If I inquired," he said, with a half frowning smile, whether you read Emanuel Kant, would you with equally unhesitating promptness, answer 'Yes?'"

"I should answer 'No,' to that."

"Ah, now I believe you. So you do read Browning? But of course! You come from Boston. I believe they have one or two Browning societies there, eh? I am told that the Boston housemaids use a new kind of patent scrubbing pail with a little shelf attached to hold their copy of Emerson."

"Those jokes are *so* old, Mr. Hyde!" Nelda deprecated. "But any way, if we do know how to read in Boston, I won't claim for us priority in all things—you have better vegetable markets here," she said, with mock humility, "and I am sure Winchester values those much more highly than she would our Boston metaphysical atmosphere and Browning clubs."

"Winchestrians appreciate to the full their superior advantages in the matter of vegetables," Hyde agreed.—"What have you read of Browning?" he asked, regarding her with interest. "And how much do you understand, and what do you like?"

"Well," she said slowly, with a twinkle of mischief in her eyes, "there is 'Sordello,' and 'The Red Cotton Nightcap Country,' and——"

"Those are the ones you like?" he sceptically asked.

"I was going to say that those are among the ones I couldn't read—the parentheses baffled me so hopelessly."

"You know what Tennyson said of 'Sordello?'" he asked. "The poem begins, I think,

"'Who will, may hear the story of Sordello.'

And ends,

"'Who will, has heard the story of Sordello.'

Tennyson, after reading it, declared there were but two intelligible lines in the whole poem, the first and the last—and that they were both lies."

"And I agree with him," Nelda said. "Are those Browning's poems that you have?"

"Yes."

"May I have the book a minute? I'll find you what I believe is the finest thing that was ever written about a bird, in all literature."

He handed it across the table, and she received it from him and turned to the index.

A sheet of note paper lay between the pages at which she opened. It was while she was running her eye down the long column of titles,

that her glance was caught and held, against her will, as with a vice-like fascination, upon some strange words written in a large hand on this sheet:

"*Married life with you, Warren, opened up abysses of degradation before me, which*——"

Nelda's eyes closed as though she were dizzy —but not before she had seen the signature at the end of the sheet—"Edith."

She felt cold with horror at having read it. She hastily turned the page to hide the fatal writing. She felt Mr. Hyde watching her and she made a pretense of searching still in the index.

"What is the poem?" he inquired. "I can turn to it at once if you tell me what it is—I know the book from cover to cover. I suppose it is 'Home Thoughts From Abroad,' that you mean? Those lines about the thrush?"

"Yes," she answered, closing the book and returning it to him.

"Can you say the verses?" he asked, wondering at something a little odd in her expression and manner, "or shall I find them?"

"It is only a line or two," she answered, with a faint smile, as she leaned her cheek on her hand; "I can say them, I think;

"'That's the wise thrush: he sings each song twice over
Lest you should think he never could recapture
That first fine, careless rapture.'"

"Yes, that is an inspired passage. I have always thought it so, and," he added, looking into her eyes, "the interpretation your voice gives to it makes it seem more so—you have caught the inner music of the thing."

"I suppose," she said, with a sudden glow and flash of her eyes, "to really understand Browning, one must have a sort of second-sight, spiritually! I have sordid, phlegmatic moods when his language is Sanscrit to me!"

"You have 'sordid, phlegmatic moods?'" he questioned, a little amused. "I find that hard to credit! You look quite incapable of it, you know. But," he added, "it is with the heart, the character, as much as with the intellect, that one appreciates Browning. Of course that may be said of any great poet. But in a peculiar sense of Browning."

"I think," Nelda answered, smiling, "I understand most things with my heart; for indeed when I find an author addressing himself just to my mind, and not appealing to the emotional side of me at all, I sadly put him aside—because, you see, I have so little time for reading any way—so when I do have a precious moment for a book, it must be a book that will rouse the *real* part of me—make me know I am still capable of a few feelings and am not absolutely torpid."

"Do you know I really think there is not

much danger of your becoming 'torpid.' I should say rather that the emotional side of you needed the check put upon it sometimes, to keep you balanced on this side of morbidness."

"In other words, you suspect me of being hysterical!"

"No. Over-sensitive perhaps."

"That sounds better," she said.

She rose as she spoke and took up her tablet and pencil.

"Are you in a hurry?" he asked, a tinge of regret in his voice, as he too stood up.

"I have a good deal to do before six o'clock."

"Take it easily. I won't have you toiling away your young life."

"I shall have to stay after six if I don't get the work done before."

"But you are compensated for extra hours?" he quickly asked, as he walked at her side to the door.

"Yes," she answered. "Thanks to your kindness, Mr. Hyde," she hastily added. "It was very good of you to make that arrangement."

"It is merely justice," he said, briefly.

He held the door open for her, and she slightly bowed her thanks, as she passed him and went away.

Hyde scarcely knew what instinct it was

that led him, when he sat down again, at his desk, to take up the copy of Browning and turn to the index where she had been reading. At sight of the note lying between the pages, his face became set. Had Miss Chase stopped to look at it? He hastily glanced over it—though that was unnecessary, as every word written thereon, was deeply branded in his consciousness. She had not had the book in her hands long enough to have taken in more than a few lines of the letter—and these few lines may have accidentally caught her eye; he could hardly believe her capable of deliberately reading them. What had she thought of what she had thus seen? He slowly read the written sheet, trying to realize how it might strike one who was ignorant of his life's secret. But he found it difficult to form any opinion in the matter—more especially as the words of the letter, familiar though they were, could not meet his eye without the stirring of thoughts and feelings which made him incapable of considering what their import might possibly be to another.

"I wonder," he thought, as he carefully tore the paper into bits, "if Edith will ever arrive at the point of wanting to marry again? I suppose she would be just narrow enough, in her puritanical conscientiousness to think it criminal to marry while I lived. Now there's

yonder little girl in Russell's office—she has a conscience constructed on something of the same plan, I imagine; for instance, she would not marry a divorced man, I'll warrant. I don't know what makes me so sure of it—but I am sure that her ideas on such matters run in just about the same limited grooves that Edith's take! I can see it in her bonnie 'ee. And in her New England manner!"

A little ironical laugh broke from him. He recalled the party at which he had been on the previous night, and the lionizing the young girls had given him. They had almost danced around him in circles! That beautiful house of his on High Street, one dowager had told him, needed a mistress, and there were not wanting plenty of Winchester maidens who were ready and eager to be sacrificed at the matrimonial altar in such a goodly cause. He was not at all inordinately vain, but he knew he would have no great difficulty in winning a wife among the fairest and most select of the marriageable damsels of the town, were he inclined to make the effort.

Yet here was this little clerk in Russell's office, poor and obscure, who if his heart were breaking for her (which it was never likely to be) could probably not be persuaded to marry him.

"No, not even though it would enable her

and her sister to give up their life of labor and poverty, and live in luxury; to send that remarkably musical little brother, of whom I hear, to Europe to study; and to give the other small brother a college education. Not any of these things would weigh the least in the balance if she has a moral code one-half as narrow as poor Edith's—which I am sure she has. And suppose she knew the cause of our divorce?"

A gray hue seemed to come over his face as he asked himself the question. He tossed the bits of paper into his wastebasket, tilted back his chair, and clasped his hands behind his head.

"I suppose," he mused, "Edith would dislike my marrying again. Well; I have no immediate purpose of doing so. But—some time—perhaps I shall want to settle down again to a domestic life, if I can discover a Jemima to my fancy."

His stern mouth softened, and a deep seriousness came into his eyes;

"As for Edith—poor, good, beautiful girl! She loved me well! And what capacity she had for happiness in love—had I been other than I am!"

The thought seemed to bring no regret or sadness to his face—only a sort of speculative interest.

"If her conscience let her consider a second marriage at all, it is to be hoped she won't be-

come infatuated with Lewis Russell, for she would be plunged into 'abysses of degradation' a second time, deeper than she was the first, I am inclined to think!"

He rose, thrust his hands into his pockets, and thoughtfully paced the floor.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I DON'T want to be uncharitable and suspicious, Nelda, but I can't help thinking the man was posing for your benefit," said Virginia, as she and Nelda sat that night on either side of the parlor lamp, working on a pile of mending, after the children had been put to bed. Nelda had just been telling her of Mr. Hyde's friendly protection of the little office-boy.

"It seems so inconsistent with the other things we know of him," Virginia continued as she turned a little stocking; for instance, his docking system; and that sentence in the letter you were so unfortunate as to read; and Mrs. Carlton favored me this morning with an account of how madly the girls are all 'rushing' him, and how he allowed himself to be lionized last night at Alice Chadman's party, when his divorced wife was present to witness it! No, Nelda, I tell you he was posing when you saw him treat that little boy with such generous kindness. It isn't in his nature to do such things sincerely."

"He did not seem to be posing," Nelda objected. "He always seems very open and direct

—and perfectly indifferent to the opinions of others."

"Well," Virginia granted, "to be sure, I can't see why he should want to impress you with his magnanimity, when he openly appears before the community as a hard and relentlessly strict employer."

"Virginia," Nelda said, earnestly, "do you know I can't help suspecting sometimes that all the mean things which are done in those mills are devised by Mr. Russell and that Mr. Hyde does not know about them? He is not fond of business—he is too literary in his tastes to care for money-making—and he leaves everything to Mr. Russell."

"That doesn't excuse him in the least. The mills are his. He is responsible for the manner in which things are conducted there. Neglect and ignorance of his affairs seem to me as culpable as intentionally wrong management."

"A great many things have been changed for the better since he came home. There are shorter hours for all the laborers and higher pay. Mr. Russell doesn't like it at all."

"The fact that he employs a man like Lewis Russell," said Virginia, "makes me sceptical of his sincerity in everything."

"That doesn't seem just, Virginia. Mr. Russell is a wonderful manager and knows much

more about the business than Mr. Hyde does. I confess I am thoroughly puzzled about Mr. Hyde. I can't make him out in the least. He impresses me as being a man of refinement and culture and force, and to manifest occasionally, a kind, sympathetic nature. But at the same time, I can't close my eyes to some things in the mills and in his domestic relations which seem hopelessly bad. I don't know what to think of him."

"He seems to interest you, Nelda," Virginia said, with a covert glance into her sister's face as it bent over her bit of sewing.

"He does," Nelda readily acknowledged. "He is a fascinating man—and interestingly mysterious."

"Miss Nelda," warned Virginia, a little anxiously, "don't go near him any more than you can help. I don't trust him—and you are such a fatally attractive little creature!"

"But what do you mean, dear?" Nelda asked, in some surprise. "How could he harm me?"

"There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy, little ignoramus. Remember you and I have no protectors in the world. Believe in my worldly wisdom, and take my advice—shun that man."

CHAPTER XV.

THE days moved on, and the late Easter vacation drew near, at which time it had been agreed that Virginia should go with Jack and Ernest and Bishop Osborn's two children, to the seaside; and that Nelda also should go if she could obtain leave of absence—a favor which she felt almost sure Mr. Russell would not grant her; but the Bishop insisted that she must not be left behind.

"It would be entirely too dreary for you to be left here alone," he said. "You need a vacation at any rate. And I am sure you can get it, for Hyde told me only the other day that the office work was always light in the spring."

"Yes, I could easily be spared now, but Mr. Russell is not very indulgent," Nelda doubtfully answered.

"Then appeal to Mr. Hyde. And if he deny you, I shall take him roundly to task."

The whole family looked forward with delight to the rare treat before them, for though Nelda was uncertain about going herself, she was none the less jubilant at the prospect of the children's pleasure, and of Virginia's much

needed rest and recreation. They all regarded the young Bishop as the good genius of their household.

"It seems so strange to have some one take an interest in us and be good to us," Nelda told Virginia. "We have been unused to it for so long!"

"Yes," Virginia assented, "and I am afraid we are in danger of being too grateful, Nelda —that is, *you* are," she said in half playful warning. "It is really not safe for people to be very kind to us these days—we shall fall on our knees and worship them!"

The day at last came on which Nelda must needs speak to Mr. Russell and ask his consent to her going. She had known all along that the necessity would be very disagreeable to her, yet she was really surprised to find how extremely distasteful and almost impossible it seemed, when she came to the point of doing it.

She decided to interview him during the noon recess instead of waiting until the evening, for she wanted it over; and, too, there was a chance that he might not stay at the office all the afternoon, and then she would not be able to ask him at all.

She stopped before his desk, after she had put on her cape and hat, and she spoke to him while she drew on her gloves.

"Do you think, Mr. Russell, that I could be

spared from the office for two weeks?" she asked; and the quiet reserve of her tone did not at all conceal the uneasiness she felt in suing for a favor from him.

He was turning the pages of a large ledger, but he closed it, when she addressed him, and pushed it from him. He leaned back in his chair and looked at her.

"Spare you from the office for two weeks? No."

The quick color rushed to her face, but her eyes were held by his in a sort of fascination.

"Why?" he coldly asked.

"No matter—since you can't spare me."

She turned to walk away.

"Stop!" he said, peremptorily. She hesitated—but she obeyed.

"If you can show me a good and sufficient reason why I should incommode myself to let you off for a fortnight, I shall consider the question."

"I doubt my ability to satisfy you that I am justified in asking such a thing, so I won't attempt it."

"She is sarcastic on my hands!" thought Russell, with an inward chuckle, and unable to hide from his face the satisfaction he felt in playing upon the girl's rebellious pride.

"I, too, doubt your ability to justify a request to desert your work for two whole weeks.

If you felt a proper interest in the prosperity of the house, there are not many things that could tempt you to run away from your duty in such fashion. There are two kinds of workers, you know—those, on the one hand, who are interested in their employer's business and anxious about its success; and those, on the other, who are interested in nothing but their week's wages."

Nelda did not deign to answer this uncalled-for insinuation that she was a shirker.

"Understand," he went on, "that you are employed here to *work*—not to shirk. And you are employed, not that you may earn a few dollars for your millinery and confectionery—but that you may be of use to our business! That, and that alone, must be your end and object. If it is not, then you are not the clerk we want here."

"Have you finished?" she asked, making a movement to go the instant he paused. Her way of receiving his snubbings invariably piqued and irritated him.

He waved his hand in dismissal and reopened his ledger. Nelda turned away. He watched her as she moved across the room toward the door. Her head was erect and her step firm.

"It isn't easy to cow her," he thought, "though she looks mild and manageable enough—hasn't at all the appearance of a very determined char-

acter—guess it's just temper that keeps her up—she's fiery. Damned pretty when she's mad! Rarest sport I know, to see her get rattled! Her sister Virginia, now, has another aspect—looks amply able to take care of herself!—must be a corker as to spunk—I'd relish taking *her* in hand a bit—a balky horse always did spur me on to the mastery of him, and it is the same with women." He laughed, jerked his chair in place, and proceeded with his work.

When Nelda went out into the hall, she saw through the open door of Mr. Hyde's office that he was within, and that he was alone at his desk. Quick as a flash, a resolution came to her. She scarcely knew what impelled her—but she would take the Bishop's advice and appeal to headquarters. At least Mr. Hyde would not be rude and insulting—he was always a gentleman in his manner toward her. But if he should refuse to give her the two weeks and should snub her for asking for it? Could she bear another ordeal such as she had just been through?

She would not stop to consider—an impulse urged her on, and almost before she realized what she was doing, she had knocked at his door.

"Come in!" he called.

He rose at once as he saw who it was, and

came around to the front of his desk. "Good-morning," he said, shaking hands. "Will you sit down?" pointing to a chair.

"Thank you, no, I just wanted to see you one minute."

He noticed her heightened color and the unusual brightness of her eyes; her tone, too, was nervous.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"May I have a vacation of two weeks?"

"Certainly," he acquiesced at once.

She started a little in surprise at his quick consent. "Do you really mean it, Mr. Hyde?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"Why should I not mean it?"

"But how will my work be done?" she objected, as though protesting against his lax management.

"Well," he said, gravely, "I suppose the business will go under while you are gone. But we shall try to worry through and keep our heads above water."

She looked at him doubtfully; "And may I have my situation again when I come back? You won't have it—filled by—some one else?" she stammered.

"Your situation will be waiting for you when you come back."

The anxious look in her face relaxed, and gave place to an expression of delight.

"Thank you, Mr. Hyde—you are very good to me."

"Not at all—you have earned a holiday—you have been faithful to my interests—why should I not care a little for yours, and give you what your health needs, a bit of rest and recreation?"

To his surprise, he saw her eyes fill with tears; she was unable to answer him at once.

"You are good to me," she repeated, after an instant; "and indeed I am grateful."

"Why, little girl," he gently protested, "you are entirely too sensitive; it is such a very small favor I am granting you."

"I am not used to having people treat me with consideration," she said, hastily wiping her eyes.

"But," he asked, looking at her earnestly, "if you expected me to refuse you the little vacation, why did you come and ask me for it?"

"I wanted it so much, I thought I would risk even the humiliation of being refused."

"But why didn't you apply to Russell, instead of to me—you work for him, you know?"

"I did ask him."

"Eh? He didn't send you to me, did he?"

"No—he refused me—and then I saw you sitting here—and I don't know what made me come in and ask you. But," she added, anx-

iously, "now that you know he doesn't want to let me go, perhaps you will want to withdraw your consent?"

"I'm a man of my word," he answered, smiling. "I've said you may have a vacation, and I'll stand by it," he affirmed, heroically, "though the mills blow up and fail on account of it!"

"Well," she replied, with a radiant look, "I am very glad I asked you."

"So am I. Why did Russell refuse you?"

"He thought he needed me, I suppose, and—he is different from you."

"Do you really think so?" he said, with a faintly ironical amusement in his face. "How are you going to settle it with him, since he told you you were not to have your holiday?"

"I shall leave that entirely to you!"

"I've got to settle it for you, have I? I call that cowardly!"

"You are bigger than I—you ought to be less afraid of him!"

Under the influence of his friendliness, she felt her spirits rising in a dangerous reaction from the crushing effect of Mr. Russell's treatment of her request.

"Very well," he said. "I'll do what I can to protect you from his vengeance. It was very sly of you, indeed, to get ahead of him, so to speak, by coming to me! If I were in his

place, I am afraid I should be tempted to discipline you for it."

She looked at him quickly, but the expression of his face was rather inscrutable, and she hardly knew just what to think of his words; there was a slight amusement about his mouth, but his eyes were so dark and serious that she was almost inclined to think he literally meant what he said.

"Well," she replied, "I am willing to be 'disciplined' for the sake of having this vacation."

"And what great things are going to happen in 'this vacation?'"

"Bishop Osborn wants my sister and me to take his two children and our little brothers to Long Branch for a couple of weeks."

"Bishop Osborn? Um—m. Good idea of his! Perhaps he and I will come down to the seaside to call on you all, while you are there—I'll suggest it to him. You will need some looking after, I am sure."

"Do give us fair warning of your coming, so we may be on our good behavior when you arrive."

"No, little Judas, we shall take you unawares!"

"Russell," said Hyde, going into the superintendent's office after Miss Chase had left him,

"I should like to hear, if you don't object, just why Miss Chase was refused a holiday?"

He sat on the edge of Nelda's desk, as he spoke, picked up her paper knife, and tapped his palm with it.

"She has not had the nerve to go to you about it?" Russell asked, surprised, and with a laugh at the incongruity of such a feat.

"And my question?" Hyde repeated, ignoring his exclamation.

"Well," said Russell, "better put the question another way—why should she not be refused?"

"I prefer my own form—why did you refuse her?"

"I have a use for her here, Hyde."

"I happen to be aware of the fact that office work is particularly slack at present. You may let Miss Baer do Miss Chase's work in the next two weeks. I have given Miss Chase the time."

Russell's eyes became steely, and his lips closed in over his teeth for an instant. But he controlled his chagrin, and answered cheerfully;

"Hyde, you had better take me into your confidence and explain to me just how you wish little Chase treated here," he said, an unmistakable insinuation in his tone. "As a privileged character, eh? She's to have just what she wants, and that sort of thing?"

Hyde felt an odd, tingling sensation along his arm, that made him want to draw back his hand and level a well-aimed blow at Russell's handsome head.

"Oblige me by saying *Miss* Chase," he said, quietly; "and as she is a lady, or what is more, a woman, speak of her respectfully."

Russell laughed; "Then you mean matrimony, Hyde? Well, I acknowledge she is pretty. But she has a bit of the devil in her, let me warn you. Not, perhaps, an unconquerable bit, however, and no doubt you could easily regulate that. I'm glad to know you are beginning to have a bent toward marriage; the girls about town are almost despairing of you as game. They won't like it any too well to learn you have picked up your office clerk in preference to any of them! They will be sorry they didn't apply for the job as clerk, ha, ha! But possibly you can guess why I am particularly pleased? Of course if you marry again, Edith will be much more likely to take the step, too, than she would if you remained single—and you may have noticed that I have a special *penchant* for Edith."

"Russell," said Hyde, earnestly, "unless you are particularly anxious for a final parting to take place between you and me, with extreme abruptness, you will never again mention the name of my—of Mrs. Hyde—in my presence."

He rose from the desk; "Miss Chase must not be docked for her two weeks' absence," he said as he turned to go away.

"Now," thought Russell, when he was left alone, "I've got to understand this game. Did little Chase deliberately walk herself over to Hyde's office and ask for a vacation? Not a bit like her, if I know anything of her character. What is he up to, anyway, in favoring the small lady so much? He must see she is not a girl he can take liberties with. Confound me, if I don't believe he is going to court her! At any rate," he added, "I shall put that bee in Edith's bonnet and let it buzz there. Meanwhile——" he set his lips and looked determined—"while Nelda Chase is in this office, she'll toe the mark! You'll pay up for this vacation, my lady! We'll see whether you can walk around my authority or not."

It was well for Nelda that she could not see his face just then, for the sight might have robbed her delightful anticipations, for the coming two weeks, of some of their glow and color.

CHAPTER XVI.

THAT night, as Hyde sat alone in the finely appointed library of his great house on High Street, he found it difficult, almost impossible, to fix his mind on the volume he held on his knee. His easy chair was drawn up in front of a crackling wood fire; a large lamp burned on a table at his elbow; the room, with its book lined walls, inviting large chairs, soft rugs, writing-desk, paintings, busts, and engravings, made an attractive picture of ideal comfort for the studiously inclined. This was indeed the only room in the large house in which there was not felt a chill of loneliness. Hyde spent many hours of his days and nights here, before this great open fire, with his beloved books.

To-night, however, the volume of Middleton's plays which lay open before him, did not interest him—for his own life's tragedy was very vividly present to him.

"Russell will persuade Edith," he thought, as he leaned back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his neck, "that I am courting Miss Nelda Chase. And what, I wonder, is poor Edith going to think of it?"

He gazed long and earnestly into the fire at his feet. The locks of dark hair hanging over his massive white forehead gave his face a look of even greater sternness than usual.

"Will it wound her? Will it outrage her? Or will she be indifferent? The first, most likely. Indifference is out of the question—she gave me the whole intense love of her fresh, virgin girlhood—and she can never quite forget it! As to its outraging her—Edith was never ungentle in her life—not even when frantically suing for a divorce from me—and when the sight of me," he mused, his head bending forward a little, "had become a horror to her—even then, I think she had a lingering love for me which she could not tear out of her heart."

He leaned his elbow on the arm of his chair, and rested his forehead on his hand.

"It is hard to tell how she would take it, if she heard I contemplated being married. It would be unreasonable of her to feel aggrieved and wounded. But then she never was a philosopher!"

However, the question of his marrying again, and of Edith's probable feelings in such a contingency, did not trouble him so much as another possibility which Russell had that morning suggested.

"I don't want her to marry that low fellow.

A handsome brute, and popular with women, I know. But—Jove! How does she stand as much of his society as he evidently inflicts upon her? I don't understand her tolerance of him. I should think every thing about him would jar on a nature organized so finely as hers. Perhaps, however," he thought, "he does not let out his brutality so frankly in the presence of women as he does with men. He may disguise it a little. And, too, Edith's long intimacy with him may blunt her sensibilities to his coarseness. But I should think when it came to a question of marriage with him——"

He shrugged his shoulders in contempt of his own apprehension; "I have no doubt I could prevent it—Edith submits to me now as much as she ever did. Anyway, it is as Russell says: she won't think of marrying unless I marry first. It will be time enough, then, for me to see about preventing a union which, for more reasons than one, would be objectionable to me."

His thoughts took a new turn.

"What a daily crucifixion it must be to a girl as sensitive as Miss Chase appears to be, to be forced into association with Russell—and in the capacity of a subordinate! I am a man, and a man of the world at that, and he makes *me* wince—he must be a thorn in the flesh to her! Of course he makes himself obnoxious to

her in a way that he does not to women whom he meets in society—to Edith, for instance."

Hyde realized how much Miss Chase must have been roused that morning, to have ventured, in the face of Russell's refusal of her request, to apply to him.

"Evidently, she doesn't interpret me quite in the terms of Russell," he smiled, "though I have sometimes thought she did—so doubtfully have those candid eyes of hers looked at me once or twice. Her eyes remind me of Edith's, somehow. She looks so remarkably like Edith, I am struck with it every time I see her."

His mind lingered upon this impression. It interested him. The more he dwelt upon it, the more convinced he was that the resemblance was extraordinary.

And now he was tempted to an act from which he had carefully refrained ever since his return home from Europe. He put aside his book, rose from his comfortable chair, and walked slowly to the door which led into the hall.

Should he do it? Was he equal to it?

He impetuously cast off his misgiving; "Am I a man and rational? Then let me have a stouter heart!"

He flung open the door and went out. Up the dark, carved stairway, to the second floor, he walked, and then through a long wide hall

—at the farthest end of which he stopped before a great mahogany door.

Should he go in? He had not seen these rooms since he had gone from them three years before, leaving behind him the crushed and sorrowing wife of his bosom. These chambers—her own peculiar sanctum—what a tragedy they had witnessed! And now for three years they had been deserted and darkened. Once, her presence had graced them—the beautiful woman who had so ardently loved him—and for him, her spirit still pervaded them.

His hand was not firm when he lifted it to take down the key to the door, which hung on the wall.

"I am as nervous as a girl," he ruefully told himself. But he resolutely put the key into the lock and turned it. The door grated on its hinges as it swung back. The sepulchral darkness within smote him with a chill shudder. He quickly searched with his fingers for the electric buttons, touched one, and the room was illumined. He went in and closed the heavy door after him.

It was a large bedroom. Everything in it—the little ebony work stand, the cherry-wood writing desk, the bookcase that once had held her favorite books, the dainty chairs and couch, the great four-post bed with its silk and lace hangings, in which their boy had been born to

them, the arch near the head of the bed, leading into his own old dressing-room—all was very much as it had been left by her. It was like coming to the accustomed place of one who had died. He shrank from looking upon these eloquently silent witnesses of her.

Walking across the floor, he pushed aside some silk *portiéres* draped over another arch which led out of the bedchamber, and entered her small music-room beyond. Touching another electric button, to illumine this room, he went and stood before a life-sized portrait which hung between two windows.

This was what he had come to see. He stood before it long, and gazed at it intently.

Yes, there undoubtedly was a remarkable resemblance between Edith and Miss Chase. It was, it is true, more in the expression of the countenance than in feature or coloring. Edith was beautiful, Miss Chase only very pretty; but there was the same look of earnestness, one might say of religiousness, in the clear eyes of both, and the same intensity and depth of feeling. The face which looked down on him from the portrait, as well as that of the little office-girl, was bright with the uplifted look of a nature capable of suffering martyrdom for the right—or for what was conceived to be right by a too fervent conscientiousness.

"Lovable characters, both of them," he

thought, "but not perfectly balanced. Isn't it a little strange that that very puritanism which in Edith drove me almost to madness, should attract me in Miss Chase? One would think I would always be disgusted by it, instead of attracted!"

He clasped his hands behind him and slowly paced the floor.

"But supremely good women are the only sort that appeal to me—chaste Dianas, the kind that would go to the stake for a scruple of conscience, or give up the happiness of their lives rather than mar their white souls with one faint blot of impurity. Such a woman, however, I could not marry, even supposing I wanted to—a very large supposition indeed."

He paused again before the portrait and looked up at it thoughtfully.

"The more I look at it, the more I see Miss Chase in it. I wonder if any one else ever thought she and 'Mrs. Hyde' looked alike? I should like to ask some one—Osborn, for instance. But—of course I can't speak of Edith to him—nor to any one. I suppose Russell is about the only person of my acquaintance—man, woman, or child—who has nerve enough to mention her name to me!"

He turned away, at last, and walked slowly back through the two apartments.

At the door leading into the hall, he pressed

the buttons to put out the lights. He went forth, then, from these rooms which for him were so haunted—but he could not shut up in them the influence of that evening's little episode; it followed him through all his life.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THIS jaunt is doing us all so much good," Virginia told Bishop Osborn, as they sat one afternoon, with Nelda and the four children, on the sandy beach. It was the fourth day of their sojourn at the seaside, and the Bishop had come from Winchester that morning to spend the day with them.

A glorious spring afternoon it was. The sunlight on the water was warm and dazzling, and it seemed ideal happiness to all of them to be basking in the brightness of such a sky and sea, under circumstances so entirely satisfying.

"To have Bishop Osborn all to ourselves in this beautiful place!" thought Nelda, with a rather wondering exultation. "I can hardly believe it!"

"You and Miss Nelda both look younger than when I left you four days ago!" the Bishop answered Virginia. "Undoubtedly it is doing you no end of good to be here."

"It is the first luxurious pleasure we have had since—in more than three years," said Nelda.

"I hope it will not be three years before you have another."

"Yesterday was such an intensely hot day," said Virginia, "that I and many of the boarders ventured to go in bathing. I went out quite far, but I made it a rule to keep near some one of the male persuasion in case I should be threatened with sinking for the third time, you know. I was lost and gone a dozen times, but I always took it very quietly—reasoning under water, in a blind way, that at least I should be washed ashore. I am lame all over from being dashed to pieces over and over again. In getting out of bed this morning, I had to rise horizontally; none of my joints would work, they have been damp so long, you see. In the water, when I would see a huge wave coming, and would know I couldn't stop it, I would shriek wildly and dive through it, coming out at the other end smiling, to spare Nelda's alarm!"

"The Bishop will conclude that the waves have affected your brain, Virginia, you rattle on at such a rate," said Nelda. "He will think you have no respect for his Office!"

"I haven't; not a bit. It is he that gives dignity to the office—not the office that sanctifies him. In fact, I have always wondered, Bishop, how so large a soul as yours could compress itself into the narrow limits of the Office of Bishop of the American Church."

Nelda looked at the Bishop in some alarm; she thought Virginia brazenly irreverent.

But the Bishop smiled, and answered her quite calmly; "It is my most earnest conviction that the Church—the religious home and school of the people—should not be abandoned by all those who have learned to see beyond the limitations she would set up; should not be given over entirely into the hands of intellectual and spiritual half-breeds whose whole effort is to hold her back from the onward march of the century."

"Virginia," interrupted Jack, in a tone of distress, "I can't find my wubber ball! It's lost. Won't you give me a nickel to buy another one?"

"Jack," said Virginia, "you have had two rubber balls in five days. You will drive me to penury and want, if you lose them at such a rate."

"I didn't lose it, Virginia, it lost itself."

"How could it lose itself, Jackey?"

"Well, it could *woll*," speculated Jack.

"There!" declared the Bishop, "such astute logic deserves a reward. Here is a quarter, Jack, to keep you in rubber balls for a month."

"No, no," protested Virginia, "please don't, Bishop."

But Jack's little fat fingers had already closed over the precious wealth. "Jiminee Kwismas!" he exulted. "See what I've got, Ernie and Jeannie and Wilhelm!"

"That's enough to buy a rubber ball and four glasses of soda water, Jack," insinuated Ernest.

"I like soda water," remarked Jeannie Osborn.

"So do I," added William, junior; "it has such a queer taste—just as if your foot was asleep, hasn't it, Papa?"

"Mayn't we all go up to the drug store now?" asked the bloated capitalist, who possessed the quarter.

"If you don't go anywhere else and will come straight back," stipulated Virginia. "Ernie, can you take good care of them all?"

"Yes," said Ernest, gravely. "I'll see that they don't get into any mischief, Virginia."

"Don't stay long," said the Bishop. "Remember, Jeannie and Willie, I shall leave you in a few hours."

"Ernest is as reliable as possible," Virginia assured the Bishop, as the children started off for the drug store which was not distant; "he will take as good care of them as Nelda or I would."

"Bishop," said Nelda, when the three were quite alone, "were you ever tried for heresy?"

"I have been threatened. But doctrines never troubled me much. I lay emphasis on the essential things, and give theories a wide berth. I prefer to learn my philosophy of life, not from works on theology, but by living."

He spoke to Virginia rather than to Nelda. He always turned to the former when he talked. And Virginia, knowing as she did that her sister romantically adored him, was a little afraid she might feel forlorn at having him devote so disproportionate an amount of his attention to herself.

"To what do you limit the essential things?" she asked him.

"Faith in man's inherent divinity," he said, his eyes glowing; "that is the essence of religion, the hope of the world's salvation, the beacon which Christ lighted on Calvary!"

"A faith which the prosaic world will not accept," Virginia said, gravely. "Bishop," she suddenly added, "your life must be lonely."

The remark seemed irrelevant, but he understood its bearing.

She continued, smiling, "It takes a great man to understand a great man, you know. I am sure you must find very few 'brethren' in the Church who can sympathize with your deeper life and broader thought."

"But occasionally I find a Virginia Chase," he answered, looking into her earnest eyes. She blushed sensitively, but her face lighted up with pleasure.

"In Winchester," he added, "among the men, I have but one real companion—and he is a real companion only to one small side of me;

Warren Hyde is a stimulating influence to any one who comes into intellectual touch with him. He thinks. And he sees a little below the surface—which, you know, can't be said of many of us."

"Isn't he congenial to you in any but an intellectual way?" Nelda inquired.

"How can you ask that, Nelda?" Virginia said. "How could the Bishop find congeniality in a character like Mr. Hyde?"

"Now, will you tell me," said the Bishop, curiously, "what is your idea of Mr. Hyde's character? I know what opinion prevails in Winchester—but what do you think of him?"

"Let Nelda speak—she knows him and I don't. But I warn you, Bishop, to take what she says with a grain of salt, for she is idiotically lenient in her judgments of people, and will declare that a man may, in the plain face of facts to the contrary, be a Christian and a gentleman!"

"Then speak, Miss Nelda," said the Bishop.

"He is a puzzle to me," Nelda answered. "He is always doing contradictory things and I don't know what to think of him. But my instinct is to believe in the good I see in him."

"Trust your instinct," the Bishop quickly returned. "I find him a puzzle, too. I confess I have given up trying to understand his character. Our intercourse is for the most part

confined to discussions of our favorite authors, and to some philosophical problems in which we are interested. But I always find that his standards are high—and occasionally I have a hope that some day I may discover the secret of his nature and find that he is after all a good man, in the best sense. By the way," he quietly continued, turning his eyes slowly upon Nelda, "he sent you a message. He bids you stay away as long as you please, to forget the existence of such a purgatory as Hyde's woolen mills, and to 'come back wearing a less anxious, tired look on your young face.' He had half a mind to come with me to-day, but," he added, gravely, "he resisted the temptation."

There was something in the Bishop's tone and manner, as he thus delivered himself, which set Nelda's heart to beating oddly. Virginia, too, looked a little bewildered. What did his grave tone imply? It sounded like a hint of warning —but against what? Both the girls understood that the "temptation" which Mr. Hyde had resisted had been merely the deserting of his business for a day's outing with his friend; Nelda had not taken her employer seriously at all when he had suggested coming with the Bishop to Long Branch to see her.

"He is very kind," she replied. "Please thank him for me."

She rose and shook off the sand. "I'll go to

meet the children," she said. "I am a little uneasy about them."

"Suppose," the Bishop suggested to Virginia, when Nelda had gone, "we take a stroll along the beach. It looks beautiful down yonder."

When the children returned with Nelda, they found the place deserted. But they played contentedly on the sand for a half hour longer, when at last they were joined again by the two wanderers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NELDA had been back at her desk for two weeks. She had thought that her refreshing vacation would give her a new lease of energy to bear the daily trials of her association with Mr. Russell. But the fact was, the little season in which she had lived in a purer atmosphere had made the return to discord and brutality seem, by contrast, a heavier cross than she would acknowledge even to herself.

Mr. Russell was now more stringent in his bearing toward her than ever before and had taken to watching her with a scrutiny that she found most annoying. She realized that he was avenging himself for her defiance of him in having appealed to Mr. Hyde for permission to go away. He had "docked" her, of course, for her absence, and had taken pains to tell her that the "docking" was by order of the proprietor. She had not expected to be paid for time in which she had not been working, but the proprietor's care about the matter seemed inconsistent, she thought, with the cordial manner in which he had granted her a holiday.

In these two weeks since her return, she had exchanged no word with Mr. Hyde, though she

had caught occasional glimpses of him in his office. The kindlier thoughts of him which had been growing in her heart during her absence, were fast being obliterated, so inevitable was it to associate him with all the unpleasantnesses of her life in his mills.

It was Saturday night, and Russell had dismissed her an hour earlier than usual—and of course had reduced her wages accordingly. She had come home, then, at five o'clock. She was always exhausted by Saturday night from the week's strain on her nerves, and on this night her physical fatigue scarcely matched the utter weariness and depression of her spirits.

She had found the Bishop's high silk hat hanging on the hall rack, and knowing thereby that he was up in the parlor with Virginia, she had crept into the schoolroom and taken refuge in the big cushioned window-seat.

The knowledge of his presence in the house was more soothing and restful to her than anything else could possibly have been; so she told herself, as she leaned back in her comfortable perch and closed her tired eyes.

"But I won't go up and interrupt them. He likes to talk to Virginia alone. The cool effrontery with which those two solve the problem of the universe together, is really a sublime spectacle to a stupid creature like me that hasn't any opinions! Virginia says I've got

only 'prejudices.' 'And feelings,' the Bishop adds."

The one faint spark of hope in Nelda's heart, in these days, was the Bishop's evident admiration for Virginia, though she was too maidenly modest to admit, without a blush, even to her secret consciousness, the delightful hope that perhaps he was falling in love with her sister. That Virginia should not return the love of such a perfect being was unthinkable. And the possibility that these past few sad, bitter years of their lives should culminate in such a happy and blessed solution for Virginia, filled the younger sister's heart with a generous rapture which she found it hard to suppress within "genteel" bounds.

Yet so far as the solution of her own life's problem was concerned, she had never been more despondent.

"Yes, the Bishop recognizes the fact that I have 'feelings' mixed with my 'prejudices,'" she thought, as she sat looking out pensively into the gathering twilight of the street. "Would to goodness-gracious I had not! Then I shouldn't suffer so horribly," she murmured, her lips quivering and the tears filling her eyes. "But why do I suffer?" she impatiently asked herself. "Just what is it I want? I have love in my life—I have Virginia and the children. Some forlorn creatures have not so much. I

suppose I am an ungrateful wretch to feel so despairing. But to be contented in a life of drudgery to which there is no outcome—O the intensity of life in me should be moderated to dullness and languor! Else it will eat out my heart with its hunger! Oh!" she whispered, crushing her clasped hands in her lap, "will my life never be sweet and full? I am homesick—but where is any home for me? I want to 'fly away with the wings of a dove'—but where should I fly?"

She did not, however, long continue to give herself up to such a mood as this. She presently checked her passionate repinings, and made an effort to revolt against the cravings which possessed her.

"Patience, patience, you restless thing!" she sighed. "Be still, Nelda Chase. If you can't find your blessedness here and now, it is nowhere for you. There," she suddenly resolved, "I'll go up to the children and entertain them!"

She got down from her window-seat abruptly, and went up the back stairs to the nursery.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was on the next Thursday afternoon, as Nelda was working at her desk, that the proprietor came into the office for a moment to speak to the superintendent. They talked for a little while, apart, on some matter of business; then, rather to her surprise, she overheard Mr. Hyde ask Mr. Russell if he could spare Miss Chase for an hour; "To do something for me in my office," he explained.

"Won't Miss Baer do?" facetiously inquired Russell.

"I mentioned Miss Chase," Hyde quietly rejoined. "Can you spare her?"

"Not without considerable inconvenience."

"What is she doing?"

"Writing some orders to Meade and Company and to Smyth Brothers."

"You can do that yourself, Russell. It will be good exercise for you. You were reading a newspaper when I came in. Just ask her to come over to me when she has finished that letter she is writing now."

"Hyde, that isn't business," objected Russell. "I need her here."

"You and Miss Baer can get on without her

for an hour. If you can't, send for young Brent in the first floor office—he hasn't a thing to do to-day."

"Why don't you use him, then?" Russell asked, with a wink, "and let me keep my clerk, who does have something to do."

"Ask Miss Chase to come to me as soon as possible," was Hyde's only answer, as he turned away and left the room.

The door had scarcely closed upon him when Nelda folded and sealed the letter on which she had been working. She looked up, expecting to be told by Mr. Russell to go at once to the proprietor's office. But he took no notice of her. She waited a few moments, wondering if she should speak to him, or just go right on with the other letters waiting for her attention. She decided to do the latter. She took up her pen again and started upon another long epistle.

Russell knew she had overheard his colloquy with Hyde and he did not doubt that she was as anxious, as was the proprietor, for the *tête-à-tête* in the office across the hall; so he had meant to subject her to the embarrassment of asking permission to go. But when she quietly went right on with her work, he grew a little uneasy. He knew that he must not tamper with Hyde. He was aware of the fact that the letter upon which Miss Chase had just begun, would take her at least twenty minutes to write, for it was

to be a long and important one. How should he let himself out of his predicament without compromise?

He walked to her chair and stood looking over her shoulder. She promptly stopped writing to wait until he should go away.

"Don't waste time," he ordered her. "Go ahead!"

"As soon as you will allow me," she said, still waiting.

"I'll read as you write—proceed!" he said, with a snap of his fingers.

"I can't think when you stand there, and this letter requires thought."

He abruptly took it from under her hand and made a pretense of reading what she had written.

"This is not as I told you to write it," he said, curtly. "It is miserably careless work! I shall have to re-write it myself. Go, now, to Mr. Hyde."

"Very well," she said, as she rose, "but I beg your pardon, the letter is exactly as you told me to write it, so far as it goes."

"That will do," he said, with another snap of his fingers and a steely glance of his hard eyes. He carried the abused paper to his desk; and she turned and left the room.

The proprietor, evidently in waiting for her, was pacing the floor. She caught a glimpse of

his face before he saw her on the threshold; his eyes were bent upon the carpet as though pondering something earnestly.

At sight of her, however, his brow relaxed, and he held out his hand and looked at her with a frank interest.

"You have not once given me an opportunity of welcoming you back after your flight," he said.

"I have almost forgotten that I was ever away—it seems so long ago," she answered, wondering a little at his speech, for he had had plenty of opportunities for welcoming her back if he had wanted to take them.

"Then I am afraid you have not been enjoying yourself in yonder office, if the time has seemed so very long to you?" he asked, curiously.

"Was 'yonder office' ever designed to be a pleasure resort?" she inquired, as she moved away to the large writing table in the centre of the room. "Shall I sit here to write, Mr. Hyde?"

"To write?" he repeated questioningly, as he followed and stood before her. "O yes, I believe I am to dictate some letters to you, eh?"

"Isn't that what you wanted me for?" she inquired, in surprise.

"Of course," he acquiesced.

He gave her a tablet, opened a large ink-well

which stood on the table, and then sat down opposite her.

She lifted her pen and looked across at him expectantly.

He rumpled his hair thoughtfully and hesitated. "Well," he at last said, slowly, "you may write—Mr. Blank Ditto, Dear Sir,"

She was a very rapid writer and she had taken down the words almost as soon as they were spoken.

"How quick you are! I shall have to put on my thinking-cap to keep you going."

He pondered the matter, rubbing his forehead meditatively for a few moments. Presently, with his eyes turned toward the ceiling, he proceeded slowly to dictate the following:

"The fact is, or rather the general impression, in plain English, you understand, Mr. Ditto, that somehow, apart from prejudice, there may be or might have been, but not exactly—the idea, however, is the same and possibly more so—you will not misunderstand, my dear Blank, though a sense of propriety restrains more pointed allusion on my part: in brief, whereas.

"In strictest confidence,

"WARREN HYDE."

Nelda had written it all and now she laid down her pen and looked at him in puzzled astonishment. "He is surely stark mad!" she thought, "and that is probably why his wife

was divorced from him!" She glanced uneasily toward the closed door—was she closetted with a maniac? She looked to see some wildness in his eyes, but he was regarding her gravely, though there was a suspicious twitching about the corners of his mouth—and suddenly, to her alarm, he threw back his head and roared out laughing. Just as suddenly, he checked himself, and bending forward, he took the sheet she had written and deliberately began to tear it up.

Her wide open eyes set him to laughing again, and his broad shoulders shook as he watched her.

"Miss Chase, I am deeply indebted to you. You entertain me. You make me laugh—a thing I have not done in a good many years except at blank fools! I say I am grateful to any one who can give me a moment of mirth."

"I fail to see how I have been amusing," returned Nelda, trying to speak with dignity, but smiling in spite of herself, for the laughter in his face was contagious.

"Of course you don't see—that is why you are so funny."

"Well," she inquired, "do you want to 'entertain' yourself again by dictating another Incoherency to your friend Blank Ditto, and then tearing it up?"

"Let us leave Blank Ditto to his own de-

vices—*I* don't care anything about him, do you? What I want to know now," he added, picking up a small copy of Shakespeare which lay on the table, "is your opinion of a woman like Helena in 'Midsummer Night's Dream?' What do you think of her at any rate?"

Nelda failed to see any relevancy which this question bore to the woolen business, or to her correspondence in behalf thereof; but she answered him readily; "Helena ought to have been ashamed of herself. She was horribly wanting in 'proper pride.' Why Demetrius spurned her! And yet she would not give up pursuing him!"

"Now I am convinced, Miss Chase, that you have never been in love. Be assured Shakespeare knew what he was talking about and Helena is a true woman. Women are the most tenacious species of the whole animal kingdom —and when a woman is genuinely in love, she clings like grim death. Nothing can make her give up—save one thing only."

"What is that?" Nelda asked, with curiosity.

"Let her conscience come between her and the object of her worship—and the Object will be vanquished. A good woman's conscience is her strongest point—stronger than her powers of loving."

He abruptly opened the book and turned the pages.

"Come," he said, "here are two copies, of 'Midsummer Night's Dream'—let us read Act Second together—Shakespeare should never be read alone."

He handed her the open book and picked up another at his elbow.

"But," she objected, uneasily, "the letters you wanted me to write, Mr. Hyde?"

"Don't you think we can find Shakespeare more interesting than writing letters?"

"I haven't any doubt of it. But," she said, hesitatingly, "didn't you really want me to write for you at all?"

"I've changed my mind. I hate business at any rate. Let's read."

"I had better go back to Mr. Russell, then—he has work for me."

"Now you know you don't want to do that. Maybe by the time we have read this Act, I shall think of a letter I want written."

She broke into a laugh at his subterfuges. She knew she would enjoy reading with him very much; but she had an uncomfortable feeling that Virginia would not at all approve of it.

"I have no right to spend my time so," she continued to object.

"Your time? To whom does it belong? To me, doesn't it? And if I choose to act the Grand Turk and order my 'chattel' to read to me, or rather with me, who dares object to my

royal will? Now then, is the question settled? We will begin," he commanded, "at the entrance of Demetrius and Helena in Act Second, Scene Second. Will you read Helena and Puck, and I will read Demetrius and Oberon."

There was something compelling about Warren Hyde that made most people feel it quite out of the question to oppose him. Nelda's was, at any rate, a very yielding disposition. She made no more objections, but took up her part and read. She did have a sense of discomfort in the thought of Virginia's probable verdict upon the unconventional performance. "Hold him at arm's length," her sister had warned her, "and keep strictly on a business footing with him. I don't trust him."

But his manner toward her was invariably courteous; and an instinctive confidence in him which possessed her whenever she was in his presence, and which she could not indeed explain, had really more weight with her than all the certain facts which she knew to his discredit. With a comparatively clear conscience, then, she gave herself up to present enjoyment, and during a half hour of very genuine pleasure for both of them, they read together. There were pauses in the reading, now and then, filled up by discussions of questions suggested by the play, but these discussions were for the most part rather one-sided, as Nelda

found herself somewhat in the attitude of a pupil being instructed by a very erudite master.

She had learned to "expect the unexpected" in her intercourse with Mr. Hyde, and she was not therefor very much astonished when just as they came to the end of the last Act, he suddenly turned to her with an abrupt question;

"Miss Chase, what do you think of me at any rate? Be frank."

"I don't think of you," she said, evasively, "very much."

"I didn't flatter myself that you did, 'very much.' But I form some sort of an image in your consciousness. Describe it to me."

"The image of a Sphinx, as I often tell Virginia."

"'Tell Virginia?' Then you discuss me with your sister sometimes, eh? 'Often,' you said. You conclude, no doubt, that I am a very worthless member of society; that I prosper upon the labor of the poor, and that kind of thing?"

An expression of sadness came into his eyes as he asked the question. Nelda silently looked at him. How could she answer him?

"Let me plead my own case a little," he said. "That hundreds of people are given employment by me, is no whit to my credit. They are employed for my benefit, not for

theirs. I practice no unselfishness in enabling them to earn a support, for they are thereby enabled to support me. But what use do I make of the wealth which falls to my hands through labor not my own? Do I hoard or squander it? Then I have no right to possess it. Do I use it for the benefit of my fellows and especially for those who work for me? Then it is well that I, rather than another, should have control of it. And what use do I make of the time on my hands during which other people are creating my wealth? A man has no right to encumber the earth who performs no useful labor."

He suddenly threw off the seriousness of his tone and looked at her quizzically.

"I am going to ask you to decide whether or not I employ my time well."

He opened a drawer in the table and took out a manuscript. "May I inflict it upon you? I wrote it for an English periodical with which I became connected when I was in London last winter, and to which I send an article once a month. This one on 'Goethe and Carlyle' I think, perhaps, you will care for. It its typewritten, you see, and rather short. You may keep it as long as you like," he said, as he gave it to her across the table. "Another copy has gone off to London. If you survive reading this, I shall let you have more."

"You are honoring me," she said, looking genuinely gratified. "This will be a great treat for Virginia and me."

"I shall want to hear your critical judgment upon my point of view, remember."

"I am no sort of a critic. Virginia is, though. She is terribly severe, too. I will tell you what she says."

"Very well. But I shall want at least to learn what impressions you get. The view you take of that paper," he said, with a laugh, "will really give me more knowledge of your mental calibre than any test I know of."

"O really then I think I must decline to read it! I don't care to have my 'mental calibre' 'tested' and exposed to derision!"

"If I didn't think you could sustain the test, I shouldn't offer you the paper."

"That sounds conceited, you know—I believe you think your paper is strong-minded and that only a powerful 'mental calibre' can survive the strain of digesting it!"

"Then at least I am complimentary to you, am I not?"

"You pat me on the head, so to speak, but that is doubtfully complimentary. Some people might like it, to be sure, seeing it is you that do it, but some others might think you patronizing."

"Look here; if you are going to make fun

of me, I'll have my manuscript back again if you please."

"I've got it and mean to keep it, until I have tested *your* 'mental calibre,' sir," she said, ignoring his outstretched hand.

"I say give it to me!" he demanded, repressing a smile and rapping the table with his knuckles.

"Take it if you can get it!" she answered, tightly clasping it.

He looked at her ruefully. "And man calls woman the weaker vessel," he remarked, with sarcasm. "I ask you, friends and fellow-citizens, when, since the days of Adam, have creation's lords not been tyrannized over by the Clinging Ivy? Well then, keep it!"

"I mean to."

"And now," he suddenly said, "I demand a reward for my forbearance with your perversity. Will you let me drive you and your sister to Lebanon next Sunday, to hear our friend, the Bishop, preach? It is a matter of ten miles, I think, and my horses are fleet. I know you are fond of the Bishop's sermons. So am I. Shall we go?"

"It would be lovely," she said, looking very much surprised at the invitation. "But——"

"'But me no buts!' There is no reason why you should not go, I am sure there is not —if you want to go, that is."

"I can think of nothing I should enjoy more," she said, growing very red (to his amusement) "but indeed there are obstacles."

"I have a way of riding over obstacles. Tell me what they are and see me annihilate them before your eyes."

"Virginia would not approve."

"The Bishop will drive back with us," he said, as though that were answer sufficient to Virginia's objection.

Nelda looked at him quickly.

"But," she answered, suddenly smiling, "there is another obstacle that even you could not conquer. It is perfectly insurmountable."

"If we can't climb over it, we can walk around it. Produce it!"

"I can't. It is quite unmentionable."

"I am convinced it is not. Tell me."

"I can't, really."

"But I know you can. I tell you my spirit is up and I will know it!"

"Please don't insist, I can't tell you."

"But I do insist—I must hear it. What is it? Out with it!"

She looked at him helplessly. "Now what a predicament I'm in! I would not have mentioned it, if I had imagined such a contingency as your insisting upon knowing it! I'm not prepared, either, with a plausible subterfuge, and can't make one up on such short notice.

Is there no course open to me but the plain unvarnished truth? I warn you, you will be sorry you asked me. You will be horribly embarrassed."

"You don't know me. I've lots of nerve. Go on."

"Well then," she said, recklessly, "the Obstacle is *boots!*"

"Boots? What the dev—that is to say, please explain."

"The boots I have on," she affirmed, grimly, looking him steadily in the eye, "are worn out and must go to the cobbler's on Saturday evening—and they won't come back until Monday morning! There! You brought it upon yourself, remember!"

"And you have but the one pair? Put off having them mended until Monday."

"Another day would be fatal! Those shoes must be mended on Saturday, or they can't be saved—their fate will be that of the 'One-Hoss Shay.' Why do you force me to these awkward confessions? The fact is," she added, confidentially, "I have to wait until Saturday evening, you know, to have them mended, because I have to wear them at the office on other days."

"Can't Miss Virginia lend you a pair for Sunday?" he asked, anxiously.

"She wears a shoe about twenty or forty times my size."

"I confess," he said, gloomily, "the case looks dark. Couldn't you wear overshoes? Or dancing slippers?"

"One must have a care about offending the eyes of society, you know."

"I might double your salary this week, so that you could buy a new pair, but you would resent my delicate forethought. I am afraid I see no way out of it." He paused a moment, then asked with a kind of speculative interest, "I suppose, now, it is quite an item in the family economics, when one of your household requires a pair of shoes?"

"I should say it is! And as for requiring a new *gown*—well, that is nothing short of a tragedy. And when one has to live in a dress as long as I have to, it is really a terribly serious matter to decide what to choose."

"But I am very much disappointed about that drive," he said. "Perhaps——"

But he was interrupted by the ringing of the great mill bell which announced that six o'clock was come and work for the day was over. Nelda started up at the sound.

"I had no idea it was so late. Why, I have idled half the afternoon."

"Never mind. We shall do it again some time," he said, walking with her to the door. "If you think of any way out of our shoe difficulty, just let me know. Promise you will."

"I have no hope," she said, shaking her head, "that there will be any way out. Good-bye."

"Shake hands," he responded, extending his own. "And come to see me again soon. Good-bye."

There was a knock on the door just as he opened it, and there in the hall stood Bishop Osborn.

"Ah, Miss Nelda," he said, taking off his hat and offering his hand; "how do you do? I didn't expect to see you here—I thought you lived on the other side of the house."

"So I do, usually—but I've been—helping—Mr. Hyde, this afternoon, to—well, to read 'Midsummer Night's Dream.'"

"Eh?" said the Bishop, looking puzzled. "You are going home now?"

"Yes. Good-bye," she said.

The two men went back into the proprietor's office and shut themselves in.

Nelda returned to her own office to get her hat and cloak. Russell was at his desk, and he did not look up when she came in, nor did he take the slightest notice of her as she tidied her desk and then donned her wraps.

She went out presently, and left him alone. She felt relieved that he had not spoken to her.

On the ground-floor of the building, as she was going through a long hall which led to the street door, she met, coming from one of the

work rooms, a lame girl who walked with a crutch. Nelda knew the child well; she had often helped her up and down the long flights of steps leading to the fourth floor, where the cripple had once worked.

"Why, Katy, are you still working in the mills?" she asked, in surprise, as they met. "I thought you had stopped, and I meant to look you up and come to see you."

"I would of had to stop, Miss Chase, thank you kindly, because I couldn't of stood them stairs no more, but Mr. Hyde he sayed to Russell, 'Put her on the ground-floor.' An' Russell sayed, 'They ain't no work fur her there an' she ain't a quick hand at best.' An' I thought, Miss Chase, I would of dropped, I was that weak in my legs with thinkin' of bein' out of work, fur no one likes to hire me because on account of the crutch, you know. But Mr. Hyde he jus' sayed again to Russell, '*Make* a place fur her on the ground-floor. An easy place. An' pay her well.' An' Russell he didn't want to do it, you may bet. But he had to, of course, so I'm down here now. An' Mr. Hyde's always got a kind word fur me whenever he sees me, an' I'd work my fingers off fur him. But Russell, he bullies me worse'n ever."

"I am very glad you were put down here," said Nelda, cordially. "Mr. Hyde is very kind."

"Ain't he now!" exclaimed the girl, fervently. "An' d'yo' know when he found that mill girl, Sarah Morgan, goin' to night-school, he talked to her an' found she was smarter'n most, an' he up an' put her in an Ormal School where they git learned to be teachers."

"He sends Sarah Morgan to a Normal School?" Nelda repeated, rather eagerly. "I am very glad for that. She deserves it. She will be worthy of his kindness."

As Nelda slowly walked through the streets to her home that evening, her heart was filled with thoughts of many things.

CHAPTER XX.

THEY did not drive to Lebanon to hear the Bishop. Ten days passed by during which Nelda did not again see Mr. Hyde except in passing glimpses. She read his manuscript aloud to Virginia, and afterward many times surreptitiously—until she knew some of its phrases, epigrams, and even paragraphs, by heart. She did not stop to question why she should thus absorb his written thoughts and sentiments; but the manuscript came to be, in the course of a week, such a companion to her that the very penmanship on the cover (the only part not typewritten) grew to have a look of friendliness. She could not bear to return the paper to him; she wanted to keep it by her; a ray of sunlight seemed to have come into her life in the possession of it.

There was also some brightness for her, now, in her daily routine at the mills, and some palliation of the misery of being associated with Mr. Russell; for there was the scarcely acknowledged possibility, always present, of catching a glimpse of a face which had become absorbingly interesting to her; or even of an en-

counter with that mind in whose presence she felt her own powers of thought and feeling so roused and stimulated.

One morning when Hyde entered his office, he found his "Goethe and Carlyle" manuscript on his table with a note lying on it.

The note had evidently been hastily scribbled there in his office, for it was on a sheet of his own scratch tablet. He took it up and read;

"I am ashamed to return your paper after all this time—it is such a reflection upon my honesty—however, I think with Marcus Aurelius, it is better to return it late than to keep it altogether.—N. B. I've no proof that he said that, but think it not unworthy of him.

"When I have an opportunity, I shall thank you for the treat of reading it, and tell you what I think of it. Hope you will be able to read this scrawling. Excuse that blot—I know not whence it came!

"N. CHASE."

He gave her an opportunity for thanking him and telling him what she thought of it that same afternoon. He joined her as she was leaving the office to go home, and persuaded her to let him take her for a stroll in the park. It was Saturday and she had been dismissed at four o'clock, so she was free to spend this extra leisure hour in a walk and talk with him.

It was a fair spring day and the park was

beautiful with its new, tender green on trees and lawns. The fresh life that was bursting forth everywhere found a response in Nelda's young heart that afternoon, which she was not wont to give to Nature's gladness.

"Usually I am sad in the spring," she said, as they leisurely walked under the great old trees in a secluded part of the park; "but to-day, somehow," she went on impulsively, her face softly radiant, "I am finding myself quite in sympathy with all this brightness."

"Why should you usually be sad in the spring?" he asked, looking down and noting, with a strange feeling at his heart, the unaccustomed happiness in her face.

"I suppose," she answered, "it is because in the spring there is generally such a want of harmony between my inner and outer world. When one's life," she said, gravely, "has turned to a very sombre hue, nature's joyous times seem to be mocking one."

"And the spring makes me pensive, too," he said, "but for a rather different reason. Every earnest soul must feel, before the divinely perfect beauty of the springtime, the futility of his own vague strivings after impossible happiness."

"But," she responded, "I have not given up hope of some day having my longings satisfied. I *can't* settle down to the conviction that my

life has got to be humdrum always!" she said, with a note of passionateness in her gentle voice that made his pulse bound in sympathy.

"But it need not for one hour be commonplace and humdrum, unless you will it so. It isn't commonplace now, it is heroic. You are a brave, self-sacrificing girl. Remember, if a life is sublime, it is so from within, not from without."

"I know," she humbly acknowledged. "And my useless pantings after unattainable things are selfish and wicked, I don't doubt. But—it seems to me one would not be human if one did not long for ideal happiness for oneself—yes, for one's own miserable self! Don't misunderstand me—I don't want to lead a selfish life, and indeed," she said, wistfully, "I am willing to sacrifice myself completely for the sake of Ernest and Jack if it is necessary. But I can't and won't believe it will always be necessary! And that is why I still hope."

"Hope for what? What is to be the ideal happiness which you are waiting to have overtake you?"

"Freedom, first of all," she answered. "Freedom to live as I feel Nature meant me to live."

"Who of us has such freedom? Life is a bondage from beginning to end—for the body at least. Man is not a body, however, but a spirit, and free—free in chains, if he will."

"I don't believe a word of it," she rebelled. "Is a bird's spirit free if her wings are clipped?"

"Now," he protested, "if you are going to become rhetorical on my hands! But," he earnestly added, "little girl, what is it besides freedom, that that hot, restless heart of yours is panting after?"

"An absorbing interest in life—something that will give me personal happiness—and make my life seem gloriously worth while!"

"But what do you think there is in this universe that can give you an absorbing interest and a happiness which shall satisfy your deepest needs?"

"I don't know; but I am sure—as sure as that I breathe and think and feel—that somewhere there does exist an Answer to the spiritual hunger in me. And some day I shall find it."

He looked up into the branches of the stately trees under which they were strolling, as he repeated slowly in his low, rich voice,

"'Tis not in seeking,
'Tis not in endless striving
Thy quest is found:
Be still and listen;
Be still and drink the quiet
Of all around.

"'Not for thy crying,
Not for thy loud beseeching,
Will peace draw near:
Rest with palms folded;
Rest with thine eyelids fallen—
Lo! peace is here.'

"Now," he said, looking down again suddenly upon the little figure at his side, "matrimony," he pronounced with conviction, "is what you think is going to bring you ideal joy. Of course. It is so with every woman. That is naturally the goal of her dreams. With you it is a nobler craving than with the average girl. But——" he hesitated, and she answered him at once;

"Don't tell me, please, that you are a cynic, that you know youth's dreams are never realized, that love is a fire which soon burns itself out, and——" she stopped short in the sudden horrible recollection of his own strange, unhappy marriage.

He understood quite well the abrupt pause in her impetuous speech, and the distress in her face. He answered her quietly;

"I am not a cynic. Life has not taught me to doubt the eternal reality of Love, and its power to make a man, or a woman, divinely blest and happy."

"I am glad," she replied, earnestly, but not easily, "to find one man-of-the-world feeling

like that—so few do. I do not see how people endure life at all when they have lost faith in all their ideals, and have become entirely practical and prosaic. If the practical side of life were all, it would be so very not-worth-while to live!"

"There is no danger of your ever becoming too practical and prosaic," he said. "You are more apt to swing off at quite another tangent, and scorn some rather necessary but humdrum details, in your very romantic views of life—because, you know," he continued, smiling, "you *are* inclined to be just a bit sentimental!"

"Sentimental!" she said, a little ruffled.

"I am sure you could unflinchingly stalk to the stake for some utterly illogical idea, some sentiment that no possible reasoning could substantiate!"

He spoke with some vehemence, and she looked at him in surprise. "For instance?" she asked. "Give me an example, please, of the irrational sentiments for which I could 'stalk to the stake' unflinchingly. I have always had a secret fearful conviction that if brought to the stake for even my very firmest beliefs, I should ignominiously *recant!*"

"You wouldn't. I know you better. There is simply no give up in you, where any moral issue is concerned. For instance, in a problem like that of Jane Eyre's"—he hesitated, for he

saw that Nelda's face was becoming uncomfortably red. Abruptly changing the subject, he drew from his pocket two small copies of "Hamlet." "Suppose," he suggested, stopping short in the path in which they were walking, "we sit down on this bench and have another Shakespeare *séance*—do you want to? I brought the books with me thinking we might find a quiet nook where we could read. This seems quite an ideal little place here, doesn't it?"

She agreed readily. She thoroughly enjoyed reading with him. She found with him a genuine companionship such as she had not known for more than three long, dull years, except with her sister; a companionship which was, indeed, in some respects unlike any she had ever known in her life. There seemed to be an intuitive sympathy between his mind and hers—or rather between his heart and hers, for it was his feelings about things, rather than his ideas, to which she instinctively responded. The latter were often too radical, too "broad," to quite meet with her sanction; but the spirit in which he seemed to look at all of life, appealed to her deeply.

The "Shakespeare *séance*" to-day, however, did not for some reason, seem to flourish as it had done the other time they had read together. Whether it was his reference to "Jane Eyre's Problem" which lingered in the thoughts of

each, distracting their attention, or whether from some other cause, they could neither of them have told; but Shakespeare, on this beautiful spring afternoon, did not interest them. The reading dragged and palled.

Suddenly, in the midst of reading a passage, Hyde stopped short, flung his book on the grass, cast his hat after it, and ran his fingers through his hair.

"No use. You and I are bored by the great William because we have things to say to each other which make his inspired thoughts of the smallest possible account to us. We would much rather talk than read. We have arrived at that stage of intimacy, when we can't succeed in reading anything together for more than three minutes at a time! Do you know this fact argues an affinity between us? I can think of no other person of my acquaintance, man or woman, with whom I prefer talking to reading, whose thoughts and feelings are more interesting to me than Shakespeare's or Goethe's, or Socretes', or your favorite Marcus Aurelius'——"

"Marcus Aurelius!" she said, smiling. "He is not an especial favorite with me—it is Virginia who loves him and reads him as if he were her Bible."

"I can guess a writer who does appeal to you," he suggested, leaning his broad back

against a tree and looking at her analytically. "Ruskin, I should think would find a place in your heart."

"How did you know it?" she asked, in surprise and pleasure at his divination.

"The delicacy and purity and loftiness of his thought you would naturally assimilate. I have noticed that your way of thinking is very Ruskinesque at times. But you don't entirely understand your favorite after all—for I found you, the last time we talked, rejecting propositions laid down by Carlyle, which seemed to you radical and irreverent, but which yet would be an inevitable outcome of some of Ruskin's theories that you readily accept. Carlyle's blunt, almost brutal, style repels you; while Ruskin's mildness and rhetoric always win you —though he may be telling you essentially the same thing which in Carlyle you detested."

"In other words, you would tell me, as Virginia is always telling me, that I feel but don't think," said Nelda, looking a little disturbed, almost hurt; "that I have prejudices but no opinions."

"Virginia is a keen young woman. Yes You could be quite illogical enough to drive me to drink. For instance," he speculated, quizzically, "you would denounce a man as brutal who would strike a dangerous madman on the head to stun him. O yes you would.

You could find no excuse at all for such brutality. 'Milder measures might have been taken,' and so forth, (while the whole community was in jeopardy). But," he said, smiling upon her, with a marvelous kindness in his eyes, "why is it that the very traits in you which would irritate me beyond measure if I came into conflict with them (for I am not a patient man before opposition) yet make me l—like you as I would not if you had not those traits? My judgment, I suppose, would approve of sister Virginia much more than it does of you—I imagine so from things you have let drop about her. But she could never find the deeps in me as your little unique, rich personality has begun to do in——"

She was looking at him in a spellbound surprise, and he was realizing, while watching her speaking face, how easily the man whom she would love could mould the impressionable little thing to his will (except in that unconquerable matter of her Puritan conscience)—when suddenly, they were both a little startled to hear footsteps coming slowly along the path by which they sat, and the trundling of a baby carriage. The spot was so secluded, and the season so early for promenaders, that they had not expected to be intruded upon. They were seated just at a turn in the walk, so they could not see who it was that was coming. They

waited without speaking, while Hyde gathered up their books, and put his hat on his head. They heard a woman's voice in soft, tender "baby talk," and the footsteps came slowly as though a little child's unsteady gait were being guided. In a moment, a nurse-girl, in the uniform white apron and cap, and pushing an empty coach, appeared around the bend. The voice and the slow steps were still a little distance behind, and the lisping tones of a child not yet in sight, could now be heard. The nurse passed with her empty carriage, casting a curious glance at the young girl on the bench; but as her eye fell upon Hyde, she started violently and wavered for an instant as though she would stop and speak to him. He saw her agitation, and in a flash he understood it. But it was too late. The little child, clinging to its mother's hand, was already upon them.

A little humpbacked boy he was, with great sad eyes and white, emaciated hands; and he was led by a young and beautiful woman, with a countenance of Madonna-like purity and earnestness. Hyde and Nelda sat transfixed and pale.

"Not tired yet?" they heard the mother saying gently. "Why Mother's boy is walking like a man! Like a big man! We shall tell Grandpa how much we walked, sha'n't we, when

we get home? and he will be so surprised! Pretty soon we shall be able to——"

She turned with a little start of surprise to look at the two figures on the bench. She too had supposed that the earliness of the season and the seclusion of this path, secured her from meeting any one. At sight of Warren Hyde, her face flushed and her clasp of the child's hand loosened. The little fellow took a step forward without her, tottered, and fell in a heap in the path. She uttered an exclamation and moved to help him, at the same instant that Hyde, too, sprang up and bent over him. With very gentle hands he lifted the little cripple to his feet. The child looked frightened, but did not cry.

"Is he hurt?" Hyde asked, in a low voice.

"Are you hurt, dear—tell Mother," anxiously spoke the fair woman, her arm clasping the child, and her hand unconsciously touching Warren Hyde's, which lay on the little boy's shoulder.

But the boy's eyes were fixed upon Hyde's face, and he did not heed her question. "Fahdy," he said, putting out his thin, transparent fingers, "Fahdy, tum wis me."

Hyde took the little fingers and stooped to kiss the pale forehead. When he stood erect again, he looked into the mother's beautiful, troubled eyes; only for an instant—then he gravely lifted his hat and turned away.

The nurse, at a motion from Mrs. Hyde, quickly carried the child to his coach, and in a moment the three were moving on.

It had all happened so rapidly—Nelda had not had time to go away, as her impulse prompted. Hyde looked at her with sharp interest as he came back to the bench. Her eyes seemed strained with distress and embarrassment. His own face was as pale as his little crippled son's had been, and there was a deep shadow in his eyes which even the sharpness of the scrutiny he fixed upon her, did not conceal.

She rose at once as he came to her.

"It is getting late—Virginia will be wondering what keeps me," she said, in a low voice; she avoided meeting his glance and her tone was pained.

"You will let me go home with you?" he asked. "We have not finished our talk, you know."

"And I have not told you yet," she said, endeavoring as he walked beside her, to throw off her embarrassment and speak to him naturally, "how I liked your manuscript."

"I have been patiently waiting for you to refer to that bit of paper. Perhaps I shall want to impose upon your good nature again and give you more manuscripts to read and criticise. Now, then, what about 'Goethe and Carlyle?'"

"I thought it a strong article; in places, eloquent; and very interesting. The friendship between Goethe and Carlyle, as you describe it, throws light on the character and writings of each of them—don't you think so?"

"They do interpret each other to the world to some extent."

"I could sympathize with everything you said in the essay, except in your unqualified admiration for Carlyle. But then," she said, in a tone of some pique, "you will say that my objections to that Scotchy old curmudgeon are pure prejudice, untouched by any faintest ray of reason!"

"I am afraid I do suspect something of the kind. Now, why don't you like him? If you have any reasons, let us hear them."

"You are always insulting my understanding."

"No; I have a vast amount of respect for that head on your shoulders. I should not like it to be different in any least particular. Who knows but your 'woman's intuitions' or prejudices may bring you nearer to the truth than my vaunted logic and speculation? So tell me why you don't like that 'Scotchy old curmudgeon?' (not a bad description of Thomas Carlyle, by the way.")

"I don't see how you can so ardently admire

the character of a man who was so unkind and inconsiderate to his——"

She stopped short in consternation, and her heart beat painfully. But she hastily collected her wits and made an effort to alter her tactless speech; "so unkind and inconsiderate to his brother when they lived together in London," she said, hastily.

Hyde looked puzzled for an instant. But as he saw the confusion in her face, he realized what she had meant to say; and mingled with another feeling in his heart, was a touch of amusement at her evasion.

"Carlyle did make it warm for that brother of his sometimes," he granted. "But I think you meant to refer to his want of consideration for his wife, didn't you?" he calmly asked.

"He was not kind to her either, do you think he was?" Nelda hurriedly answered.

"He never meant to be unkind. But he was self-absorbed and, as you say, inconsiderate, and never thoughtful of her. A flaw in his character, I grant it was. He compelled her to sacrifice her life to him. But his *purposes* in life were always sublimely noble. And if he did make some sad mistakes, shall we therefor refuse to light our little torches at the great sun of Truth which he came to reveal? I tell you he was a giant among men—in mind and spirit. A giant in fearlessness and insight.

The world gives us too few such men, for us to be willing lightly and ungratefully to reject any one of them. Now, little girl," he added, smiling, "haven't you confirmed my accusation? You would reject this great prophet and teacher with all that he taught because, forsooth, he had dyspepsia and was a fretful husband. You are like Mrs. Tulliver, whose husband declared of her that she would dismiss a good workman because he had a mole on his nose!"

"I know you think me a small-minded, contemptible imbecile! But indeed I don't think I am such a villain as you paint me!"

"A villain?" he repeated, laughing. "No, but you are a woman. Feminine from the crown of your head to the soles of your shoes! By the way, did you get them mended?"

"Yes. They will hold together for some time longer now, I think. But tell me—how can a man be a prophet of Truth who is not 'faithful in little things?' 'He who is just in little will be just in much.' If the principle and purpose of his life were 'sublimely noble,' as you say they were, how could he so ignore the 'little things' and let a human soul die of spiritual hunger at his very side, while he sought to feed millions who rejected his 'Truth?'"

"Heigho! What have we here? A Portia

—a Daniel come to judgment? Eloquent pleader, you have justice in your case. Nevertheless," he added, "the anomaly does sometimes occur—a sublimely noble soul who has neither eyes, ears, nor thoughts for the small details of the daily life about him, some of which details, I admit, should claim his faithful love and care as fully as the greater things of the universe which he sees as others do not. St. Augustine was a man of the sort. After years of absence from the humble abode of his aged parents, who longed and pined for a sight of their dear son, he one day passed their house; but he was so engrossed with his lofty spiritual meditations, that he forgot to go in and see them."

"Then St. Augustine was a brute!" Nelda said, with vehement protest.

Hyde grinned with delight as she rose to the bait.

"The human quality in you is your strongest point, and you are repelled by everything that seems to you wanting in that. It is what makes you so attrac— it is what draws people to you so," he amended, "as the most lofty transcendentalism could not draw them. Well, as I have said, there is justice in your case. St. Augustine and Carlyle had their limitations. And so," he added, with a sudden change of tone, and speaking in a grave, quiet voice,

"and so also, I suppose you think has Warren Hyde his moral limitations and obliquities."

"But you are not lacking in the human sympathy that you acknowledge Carlyle and St. Augustine did not have. You are observant and thoughtful of the small things and—you are kind—I feel it and I know it!" she went on, her eyes very bright, her tone defensive as though she were shielding his character from an imaginary accuser.

"Here again we have an instance of feminine want of logic. You say I am 'kind.' But facts are against it," he said, in the same grave, quiet voice. "You ignore the facts and cleave to the prejudice in my favor which, for some inexplicable reason, you have conceived."

"You have always been kind to me. That is one 'fact' I do not ignore."

"But what a personal view that is! You should look at the case more broadly, in its more universal aspects, you know."

"Bother my feminine want of logic! I can think of nothing more dreary and monotonous than masculine, broad-minded reasonableness!"

"Nor I," he assented. "Feminine prejudice is much more amusing. What did Mademoiselle Virginia have to say of the 'Goethe and Carlyle' paper?"

"She was enthusiastic about it. She loves Carlyle—though she does think he was dyspep-

tic. She says the paper does you credit—though it makes you seem more of a Sphinx than ever."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you. No doubt her reason for her opinion included all the facts of the case and was logical enough to have delighted an Aristotle! She thinks she can understand, now, your friendship with the Bishop."

"Was that ever a mystery?"

"Yes, indeed. You see, she thought of you as rather a worldling; and of the Bishop, as a kind of Thomas à Kempis, a sort of mediæval saint, or a seventeenth century Pascal, you know."

"And how does the manuscript alter her view of me?"

"She says it shows that you have high standards, intellectually at least, and that your way of looking at life is anything but shallow or sordid. But still she finds you an anomaly."

"I 'have high standards intellectually at least.' Does that imply a doubt as to the loftiness of my moral standards?"

"Don't expect *me* to be analytical and discriminating. You will have to ask Virginia herself."

She stopped as she spoke, before a small two-storied frame house.

"This is where you live?" he asked, with a

quick glance over the humble but pretty little dwelling, as they stood at the foot of three wooden steps.

"Yes; your property, you know," she answered.

"And your sister keeps a school here in the house?"

Before she could reply, the door opened suddenly, and Virginia, wearing her hat and wrap, and carrying a small paper package, came out.

"O Nelda," she said eagerly, at sight of her on the pavement, but stopped short as she saw that she was not alone; and as she realized who it was that was with Nelda, her face became cold, and her head sat a little more erectly on her shapely shoulders.

"Virginia," said Nelda, "let me introduce Mr. Hyde—my sister."

Virginia bowed gravely and did not offer her hand—which Nelda thought very freezing behavior, in view of the fact that they were at their own home. Hyde looked with interest into the handsome and rather haughty face of the elder girl. A decidedly superior countenance he thought it, with its stamp of high-breeding and keen intelligence.

"I am glad you have gotten home, Nelda," Virginia said, with a quiet dignity, "for I have to go out, and I didn't like leaving the children alone."

"Will you come in, Mr. Hyde?" Nelda asked.

"Thank you—I want to, you know—but I ought not to take up any more of your busy hours, I suppose—you have been generous to me to-day. Some time, if I may, I will come down here to see you. Good-bye, for the present."

He clasped her hand for an instant, and lifted his hat as he bowed to the stately figure on the top step.

When he had turned the corner and was walking down the street, he smiled to himself as he thought of the reception accorded him by the elder sister.

"A unique thing in my experience—to be treated coldly, not to say haughtily, by a young girl. Decidedly I am not used to it! The mothers and daughters of Winchester are charitable and condone my shortcomings. A man with a bank account like mine, can't have any really irredeemable faults or vices. Am I low-minded to be judging my feminine friends in this style and attributing to them sordid designs upon me? I think not. I am simply clear-eyed enough to recognize very palpable facts. Why does Miss Virginia Chase take a different view of me and resent my walking home with her little sister? Honest girl! I must at least respect her. While there are a few women like

her in the world, a man cannot quite become a cynic. No," he mused, "in spite of experiences which would make a Diogenes of some men, I am not very cynical. I know there are disinterested people; there is Osborn," he thought, with a half smile; "and Nelda Chase, and the regal Virginia, who respect not my wealth and influence—and there is Edith."

The picture again came before his mind of the lovely face of the mother of his child, as she had looked for a moment when, unconscious of his presence, she had tenderly led her little boy by the hand, and had talked to him in a voice of such penetrating sweetness, that its tones yet lingered in the heart of the banished husband and father.

"She is learning to love him more heartily," he thought, a grave, pensive light coming into his expressive eyes. "I knew she would. What a great mother heart she would have had for a child born under other conditions! A richer heart, even, than she had as a wife—and God knows how rich that was! Strange, strange fatality—we who might have been so unusually blest—how much we both have missed!"

He shook off these sombre musings and turned his thoughts again to his meeting with Virginia Chase.

"Evidently, she thinks none too well of me. Now I wonder just what kind of an idea she has

of me? A girl of inordinate pride, she is, and of a great deal of nobility of character, I judge. She is strikingly handsome—but to *my* Turkish Sultan taste, she could never be the rival of her gentle-hearted little sister. The clinging ivy kind of woman, so to speak, has always appealed to me rather than the stately pine sort. I should never be tempted to play Petruchio to such a high-spirited girl as Virginia Chase appears to be—whereas, Nelda——"

He walked slowly in the gathering twilight, through the long streets, one hand thrust between the buttons of his coat and the other held behind him. His face was sternly serious.

"Nelda is greatly influenced by her sister. Too much so, perhaps, though there is nothing weak in the child's character. That is her charm. She is gentle and yielding without being weak. And I am only too sadly convinced that I should find in her my match in determination and persistency if I should attempt to persuade her to—give herself to me. And I shall find, too, a formidable antagonist in Sister Queen Zenobia if ever I attempt to win for myself what I find I am beginning to covet with fatal yearning—the true love of that hot-hearted, sweet little thing! To have and to hold—as my precious possession! For in her alone, of all the women I have known—since I

lost Edith—can my soul find the home it longs for."

He had arrived at the gate of his "place" on High Street. He opened it and went slowly up the long walk to the front door.

When he had entered the house, he went at once to his library. The lamps were lighted and the blinds drawn in readiness for him. He sat down before his desk and wrote two notes, with which, as soon as they were finished, he dispatched a servant to post for him.

The first was addressed to his house agent, whom he directed to reduce the twelve dollar rent of the dwelling-house at one hundred and sixty East High Street, occupied by the Misses Chase, to six dollars a month; to keep the house in perfect repair, and to make any improvements in the way of papering, carpentering, or plumbing, that the Misses Chase wished to have.

"Of course," he told himself, as he sealed the envelope, "one can help such people very little —they won't allow it. Perhaps Virginia will be rebellious even at this little token of my friendliness!"

The second note was not so readily written. He hesitated over it, dipped his pen several times before commencing, tore up his first effort, and finally, with an impatient, "Confound my idiocy!" he rapidly wrote the following:

"Dear Edith: Does the child suffer any bad effects from that tumble? I noticed that he fell on his back and I am feeling uneasy about him. Of course you will let me know if there should be anything the matter with him.

"I think of relieving you of the care of him soon, and bringing him here."

He paused, leaned back in his chair, and stared frowningly at what he had written.

"She has grown fond of him," he muttered. "She will think me brutal to write that. It is a lie of course—I have no idea of taking the child from his mother. I only want to make her realize how dear to her he has really become. The idea of losing him will make her know. But—perhaps I take an unkind way of teaching her."

He took up his pen and added, "—unless it would grieve you to part with him—in which case, your wish in the matter could be my only law.

"WARREN HYDE."

When these notes had been sent away, he walked through his great empty house, upstairs to his dressing-room, to make ready for his lonely dinner.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I AM going to ask your advice about something, Bishop," Virginia said, one afternoon as she and Bishop Osborn sat together in her little parlor.

He was always with her, these days, by four o'clock in the afternoon, when he was not out of town on diocesan work.

They were sitting in easy-chairs in the small bay window of the cozy room, Virginia's fingers busy upon a little spring jacket she was making for Jack, and the Bishop lounging in comfortable indolence, watching her—the movements of her white, capable hands, the play of the sunlight in her hair, the changing expressions of her fine face—with a contentment in his soul as profound as the depths of his gray eyes.

There was a look in Virginia's face these days, that was new to it; a youthful glow of hope and happiness, a richer womanliness; a less anxious, careworn expression.

"It is a delicate matter, Bishop, and I don't quite like to speak of it to you—but you are our only friend, you know, and of whom else could I ask advice?"

"There is nothing you should hesitate to talk about to me, Virginia,—nothing."

"But indeed," said Virginia, blushing, "if I were not so thoroughly perplexed and troubled, I should not speak to you of this thing—because it is about a friend of yours."

"Warren Hyde?"

"How did you know I meant him?" she inquired, a little startled.

"He is the only friend of mine about whom you would be likely to speak to me."

"But what do you suppose I want to say of him?"

"Not being a Telepathist, child, I can't divine."

"Haven't you any idea at all?"

"Perhaps he is becoming too friendly to Nelda?"

"Then you noticed it?"

"I have thought of it."

"He called here on the afternoon of Labor Day when the mills were closed, and yesterday he sent her those beautiful roses on the mantelpiece. He has reduced our house-rent by half," she said, in a troubled tone, "which makes me almost determine to move into one of Mr. Kennedy's houses across the street! Only it would seem ungrateful, I suppose."

"Yes."

"He lends Nelda books and manuscripts;

and he often walks home from the mills with her. I don't like it. She ought not to let him, ought she?" she asked, anxiously.

"Why, Virginia?"

Virginia turned her eyes to her sewing and was silent for a minute.

"Well," she said, presently, "he is a man of doubtful character. I think we ought to—to discountenance him. The fact that Nelda is employed by him need not compel her to recognize him socially."

The Bishop could not repress a smile. Virginia's proud independence, her lofty way of ignoring, in her fallen estate, her real inability (according to Winchester standards) to "discountenance" a social potentate like Hyde, were divertingly unique.

"Have you ever met him?" he inquired.

"Only at the door, once, for a minute. I have never talked with him."

"How does Nelda feel about the matter?"

"She won't snub him. He has been kind to her and—she likes him. She doesn't see why they can't be friends."

"Neither do I. But there is a difficulty involved. Two such people as Warren and Nelda—young, ardent, fascinating, both of them—cannot be friends without becoming more than friends."

"I have not let myself even imagine such a

thing as that," Virginia quickly answered. "I think of Mr. Hyde as a married man."

"But if you condemn even a friendship with him because you think him a person of 'doubtful character,' then you must disapprove of my 'countenancing' him, Virginia."

"I have too much confidence in you to disapprove of any thing you do," she said, with a smile. "If you do it, it must be right. And then, I have read one or two of his manuscripts, and I quite understand what an interesting companion he must be to you."

"Let us get at the truth of the case," he said, leaning a little forward and speaking earnestly. "It seems to me that a friendship between Hyde and Nelda can not harm her, for at the slightest revelation of any thing really evil in him, Nelda would draw back, and the friendship would be at an end. So long as she finds him a congenial friend, be assured he shows her only the good side of himself. It is the good, not the evil, that is in him which attracts him to her—and which makes her, as you say, value his friendship. But—the real danger of the case you have not recognized. One of the two—or perhaps both—will suffer in such a friendship. They are playing with fire—as I have done," he added in a low voice, "and gotten myself burned."

"Perhaps not hopelessly," she answered, try-

ing to speak lightly, but unable to keep her tone quite steady.

"William," she added, gently (he delighted in the rare times when she called him by his name) "if I do not some day learn to love you in the perfect way that I must love the man to whom I can give myself completely—if you, of all men, do not inspire that kind of love in me, I shall despair of my cold heart—and I shall know I am not worthy of you!"

"If *I* were more worthy, Virginia, dearest, you would have no doubts of yourself," he said, a little sadly.

"No," she said, shaking her head, "you are far, far nobler than I am. You rouse all the good that is in me, and your mere presence subdues the bad. Of one thing I have no doubts—no other man but you can ever win my love. Now," she added, leaning back in her chair, "about Nelda—she knows Mr. Hyde is not a good man, so how can she care for his friendship?"

"How does she know he is not a good man?"

"As you must know it too," she answered, in some surprise. "Surely I am not uncharitable in pronouncing against a man who is divorced from such a good and lovely woman as Mrs. Edith Hyde. And then—there are things done in the mills—but of that I ought not to speak. Any way," she added, "Nelda is per-

fectly sure that the injustices there, are not Mr. Hyde's doings at all. Indeed, she knows of several very kind, good things he has done."

"The divorce," said the Bishop, "is against him, of course. To my mind, it makes another marriage out of the question for him. Not that I would think so in all cases of divorce—by no means. But in this case, it seems to me that a very sacred bond was broken—violently and ruthlessly. So, I say Nelda is playing with fire in encouraging a friendship which, in the nature of things, must develop into something stronger than friendship, but which cannot be consummated in marriage."

Virginia's sewing had dropped to her lap, and she was looking at him intently. "Then you agree with me that she ought to have nothing to do with him?"

"As little as possible. But you will observe, Virginia, that I object to the intimacy on other grounds than yours."

"Yes. The marriage question, I confess, had not seemed even a remote possibility to me. Indeed I don't really think such a thing occurs to Nelda either."

"You have never talked with Warren Hyde and felt his charm and power," the Bishop quietly answered.

"But Nelda would be even much more averse to the idea of marrying a divorced man

than I would be. She is much more conservative."

"Yes. She would never marry him. We need have no fears of that. But she can break her heart, you know."

"What shall we do about it?" Virginia appealed to him, her eyes seeking his counsel with a confidence that thrilled him strangely.

"Well," he said, slowly, "in the first place, I—will speak to Hyde."

"You are very good. And don't you think I ought to persuade Nelda to resign her position at the mills?"

Before he could answer, there was a knock on the parlor door, and Mrs. Quigmy appeared on the threshold.

"Your Rev'rence the Bishop, there's a depot-cab-kerridge at the door askin' fur your Rev'rence," she announced.

"Very well—tell the driver, please, I shall be down directly."

"I must drive out to Morganville for Confirmation to-night," he explained to Virginia, when the door had closed again upon "Quig;" "I wish you could have the drive with me. But it would not do," he added, with a smile which seemed to contradict the seriousness of his eyes. "I must have an undistracted mind for the sacred duty—and with so distracting a companion as you, I am afraid I should stand

up in the pulpit and chant love-sonnets like an Endymion, instead of haranguing the young confirmants."

"They would like the love-sonnets better—the girls would at least. Now don't tell me I am irreverent," she protested, "for indeed the worship which young people give you is, in my opinion, a fervent religious sentiment—as high as any they are capable of. Why should they not worship Goodness in the form of Bishop Osborn as well as in any other form?"

"Pantheist, heathen, idolater!" he chid her, as they stood together, her hands clasped in his. "But you have given me a theme for a sermon! Which I find myself burning to preach! Do you know, I almost never have a talk with you without having sermons galore, roused in me? The truest, most earnest ones I have ever preached, have been inspired by you."

"Is it my natural born wickedness that inspires such earnest exhortation?" she asked, looking at him with a smile which made it hard for him to resist taking her face between his hands and indulging in the forbidden demonstration of his love for her.

"That native wickedness of yours that you are always trying to make me recognize—I am afraid my love is too blind to see it. Indeed, I must, forsooth, while in these Cupid's toils, agree

with your clever Quig's verdict upon you—'Young, but so wirtuous!' You see, dear, with such a brow as this," he said, drawing his fingers across her forehead, "you would not find it an easy matter to convince the most austere jury of your 'total depravity.' But there," he added, with a long breath, "I must tear myself off! Try to make yourself easy about Nelda. I shall have a talk with Hyde. Let us hope no trouble will come of the matter. I shall not be able to see you to-morrow, Virginia; I have to leave in an early morning train for Philadelphia. But I shall be back in the evening—and you may look for me after school on Friday. To-morrow is a lost day in our lives!"

"No—we shall be together in spirit."

"Which makes it all the worse to be parted in the body," he objected. "If we were not always together in the spirit, do you suppose I should ever care whether I were bodily present with you or not? No, no, dear love; when your love for me is as great as mine for you, you will not be satisfied with only my spiritual presence!"

Another knock on the parlor door; and Quig threw it open with the announcement, "Mr. Hyde!"

CHAPTER XXII.

BRIEF greetings had been exchanged at the parlor door between the newcomer and the Bishop, and the latter had taken his departure; and now as Mr. Hyde walked further into the room, Virginia came forward from the bay window. There was something in the beatific look of her face as she distantly offered him her hand, which made him realize that he must have inopportunely interrupted a very interesting *tête-à-tête*.

"My sister is out, Mr. Hyde," she said, making no movement to sit down. "I thought the servant knew it."

"So she told me, but I said I would wait. Shall I be intruding? I know Miss Nelda will be home soon, for the mill offices close early today; and she expects me here."

"Then will you sit down?" Virginia asked as she herself moved to a chair in the middle of the room.

"But don't let me detain you," he objected, seating himself, however, a few yards away from her and regarding, with secret amusement, her dignified disapproval of himself; yet feeling, at the same time, an intense admiration for

the exquisite grace of her womanly form and the noble beauty of her face.

"You are not detaining me," she answered, determined in her heart to let him see that the "head of the house" objected to him thoroughly, and half resolving to remain in the room even after Nelda came; she felt, however, a lively interest in meeting this much-talked-of man face to face, and she was curious to see how he would impress her.

But before she could gather together her forces to crush him, he suddenly startled her out of herself by an abrupt exclamation;

"You are looking at me, Miss Chase, as who should say, 'False wizard, avaunt—I will *not* produce my sister!'"

She opened her eyes in surprise at such a speech, and her dignity relaxed in a helpless laugh.

"I assure you, Mr. Hyde, I don't have her concealed anywhere in the house."

"Are you sure? For indeed I thought she would be home by this time. Else I should hardly have risked coming," he said, rapidly, "knowing that I must run the gauntlet of an inquisition at the hands of Queen Zenobia, with no gentle intercessor in the person of Miss Nelda, to come between me and the lightnings of her majesty's wrath!"

"You do not look in the least frightened,"

Virginia answered, feeling herself blushing uncomfortably.

"I am concealing my feelings—I would not have you see what a craven coward I am."

"I must be a Medusa rather than a Zenobia. I hope Nelda will come soon to protect you."

"If I can keep my teeth from chattering, I shall be glad after all, of this opportunity to make the acquaintance of such a noted philosopher as Miss Chase."

"'Noted philosopher?' Have I, like Byron, awakened one morning to find myself famous?"

"In the eyes of your young sister you are an Aristotelian logician! and even our friend, the Bishop, thinks you something of a Plato!"

"And you say to me, do you, as Madame de Stäel asked Kant at a dinner-party, 'I've got five minutes to spare—can you give me your theory?' No," she said, shaking her head, "I used to have 'views' on most subjects—but time has made terrible havoc among my opinions. It has left me with but one poor, forlorn, sickly, utterly unphilosophical conviction, and that is that I have no convictions on any subjects whatsoever!"

"Not an Agnostic, I hope? Pray spare my feelings!"

"No. For though I have given up thinking (because, as Quig says, it goes to my head) I do have, like Nelda, a few feelings left—and I

take my philosophy in that form, you know. It is a much simpler way."

"But impossible for you," he asserted. "You must think—whether you want to or not."

"How do you know that of me?" she quickly asked.

"Your appreciation (as reported to me by Miss Nelda) of my manuscripts," he said, grinning with an air of mock-conceit, "makes me know you must be a thinker! And you know one cannot will to stop thinking—as one cannot will to stop loving."

"But surely we can will to do whatever we know it is right to do—even to stop loving," she said impetuously.

"Perhaps we can will to *do*—but not to think and feel. No, no, we are not free-will agents—though Nature, for uses of her own, tricks us into believing that we are. No logic can prove it. You, for instance, imagine, no doubt, that you are free either to devote your life unselfishly to the interests of Ernest and Jack, or to abandon them and seek your own fortune and advancement in the world. But you have no such freedom. Constituted as you are, you *must* live, unselfishly."

"But that is rank fatalism."

"Label it if you like. The fact still stands."

"Then you think some men must be base, and can't be noble?"

"Logically speaking, yes. And yet," he said with a touch of earnestness, "my heart agrees also with Emerson, who says,

"'If above himself man can't erect himself,
How poor a thing is man!'"

"But," answered Virginia, "that characteristically Emersonian sentiment is a flat contradiction of your horrible fatalism-business."

"But you must not demand consistency or you will never get at truth!" was his cynical reply. "Consistency makes dogmatists."

"Apparent consistency, perhaps—not genuine."

"Oh, as to genuine consistency—do you expect me to be a god?"

Something in the tone of the question recalled her wandering purpose of freezing him out of the house. "Gracious!" she thought, "I'm being too agreeable!"

"Women ought to expect men to be gods," she said, with a return to her distant manner and tone. "Or at least to be godlike. I mean," she explained, uncomfortably conscious that her remark was *à propos* of nothing, "godlike in their lives, even if they are not in their philosophical theories!"

"Now I call that a violent turning of the subject! What, so to speak, are you up to? Your glance is again accusing me of perfidy as

dark as Erebus! Ah," he said, suddenly rising, "here comes Miss Nelda—she will make you stop abusing me."

"Abusing you?" repeated Nelda, questioningly, as she came forward and gave him her hand. "What's the matter?"

"Ask Miss Virginia—I don't know."

"The trouble must lie in Mr. Hyde's guilty conscience," said Virginia, lightly, as she too rose; "I shall ask you to excuse me now, please—I must go and see what the boys are doing—they have been quiet for an ominously long time and I tremble to think of the 's'prises' they may possibly be preparing for us. If I were the Xantippe that you seem to think me, Mr. Hyde, I should long since have laid down a Spartan law in this household, prohibiting 'surprises' in any shape or form—for they usually mean a day's cleaning up for Nelda, Quig, and myself!"

"What form do they usually take?" he asked.

"Cookery, very often. Once the two little imps attempted a pie! Once it was millinery—Jack trimmed a hat for Nelda."

"And once Jack tuned the piano," inserted Nelda.

"Enterprising children," he said, approvingly. "By the way, you must let me take them with me some day when I take my little cousin,

Harry Gage, in my skiff, for a fishing excursion."

"They would be delighted!" said Nelda, gratefully.

But Virginia answered nothing. She made her adieux gravely and went away.

When they were alone, Hyde, with an air of satisfaction, led Nelda to the easy-chairs in the bay window, and they settled themselves cozily for a chat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I AM so glad the boys are in bed," Nelda said, coming out of the children's bedroom and joining Virginia in the parlor late that same evening; "I want to hear about your talk with Mr. Hyde this afternoon, Virginia. What did you say to each other? And what do you think of him, now that you have met him?"

"I understand better, now, your toleration of him, Nelda—I grant he is a fascinating kind of a creature—and immensely good-looking. And clever—O yes, I never said he was not clever. But," she continued, in a tone of such solemn warning that Nelda began to look awe-struck, "I could not help recognizing one fatal fact about him, Nelda."

"What was it?" Nelda asked, in some alarm.

"*The man is domineering!*"

Nelda stared for a moment—then with a look of infinite relief, she leaned back in her chair and laughed.

"It doesn't take much discernment to recognize that 'fact about him!' But I don't call it 'fatal.' I—rather like it."

"'Like it!'" Virginia repeated. "Then why don't you like Mr. Russell?"

"His is a different kind of domineering," said Nelda, quickly. "He is ill-bred and cruel. But Mr. Hyde, while he is as strong and firm as a man can well be, has, as I told him one day, something so kind about him, that——"

"You 'told him!'" exclaimed Virginia. "I must say I think you were rather familiar, Nelda!"

"Well, Virginia, I've no doubt you often say more familiar things than that to the Bishop. I've known you to in my very presence."

"Who would mention Bishop Osborn in the same breath with Mr. Hyde?" demanded Virginia. "And any way," she continued, "I don't see what makes you think you like a domineering man. 'Strong and firm,' you call it—but that is quite another thing. The Bishop is strong and firm, but he is not domineering. If he were, I should—I should resent it and I should not—like him very much. Mr. Hyde deliberately downs one! I can see he is a man who has just got to have his own way."

"I know he is. But at the same time he has such a depth of tenderness in his nature——"

"How did you find it out?" icily interrupted Virginia.

"Think of that girl he sends to the Normal School; and the little office-boy to whom he is always giving treats; and lame Katy Reese at the mills; and his generous kindness to me."

"You exaggerate his kindness to you, dear—it seems greater in contrast with Mr. Russell's disagreeableness. And how can all those little trifling charities count against what you know of the story of his divorce?"

"But I don't know the story of his divorce," Nelda gravely answered.

"I should think it would at least make you doubt the real 'tenderness of his nature.' Even the Bishop pronounces it a stumbling block."

"I don't think it is any of my business."

"But doesn't it repel you?"

"Did you feel repelled when you talked to him this afternoon, Virginia?"

"N—no, not exactly."

"You said he was fascinating."

"Yes. But I can fancy he might be cruel to any one who opposed his will."

"Not 'cruel,'" objected Nelda, shaking her head. "He is thoroughly chivalrous and unselfish and magnanimous. I never saw a small, mean thing about him."

"Except that he employs Lewis Russell as superintendent of his mills, and drove a lovely wife to the extremity of being divorced from him. Forgive me, Nelda, for ringing the changes on that divorce—but indeed your friendship with him makes me very uneasy. I thought when I would tell you I had discovered he was domineering, that you would turn against him."

"O Virginia!" Nelda burst forth, half laughing, but with a high color in her cheeks, "sometimes I quite long to have him direct that colossal determination of his toward *me*, and rule me with a firm hand! I should enjoy it!" she recklessly declared. "Yes, I should! That is the kind of abject, cringing nature I've got—now you know!"

"Mrs. Quilp!" murmured Virginia, gazing at her sister in amazement. "You want to marry a Quilp, do you?"

"Who is talking about marrying?" asked Nelda, her high color suddenly fading, and her bright eyes growing dull.

"What do you want to be 'ruled' for, you donkey?"

"If you are going to employ epithets, Virginia——"

"I wouldn't let a man rule me!" Virginia affirmed. "I don't believe you are related to me at all, Nelda Chase—you are a changeling! To *want* to be ruled! Gracious!"

"With tenderness—not with unkindness. I don't believe Mr. Hyde ever spoke a harsh word to his wife!"

"Are you considering accepting the vacancy occasioned by her withdrawal from her Sultan's palace?" Virginia inquired, with good-natured sarcasm.

"I don't think the position is open to applicants," Nelda answered.

There was silence between them for a moment. Suddenly Nelda rose;

"This conversation is a bore—I'm going to bed," she announced.

There was a note in her voice that Virginia could not quite interpret. She took Nelda's hand and held it to her cheek; "Have I been hateful to you, Nelda?"

"No, no, dear. You have a right to your opinion of Mr. Hyde. I can see the drift of your fears—but it passes my comprehension how you can think it possible that I would consider marrying a divorced man."

"Then why don't you discourage him?"

"Time enough for that when he begins to 'court' me," Nelda quickly retorted.

"In my humble opinion, sister, he has begun —sending you roses, reducing our rent——"

"A rather unique way of 'courting' a girl, that would be—reducing her house-rent!"

"'Logically speaking, yes—but the fact stands'—to quote a remark Mr. Hyde himself made to me this afternoon. But there, there, I won't tease you any more. Go to bed, I'll do the locking-up. Good-night." And with a parting pressure of her sister's hand, she let her go.

But when a little while later, she went abstractedly about the house fastening doors and

windows, her thoughtful face looked pale and a little troubled.

"I am afraid it is high time for William to speak to Mr. Hyde—high time!" was her conclusion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LEWIS RUSSELL felt too secure of his position, in the Hyde woolen mills, under the careless supervision of a proprietor of literary and artistic tastes, to modify his stringent treatment of his fair young clerk on account of Hyde's very evident fancy for the girl. On the contrary, this circumstance made him rather redouble his own strictures in dealing with her —except when directly under Hyde's eyes.

Therefore, he did not hesitate, one morning when the little office-boy had been sent off on a long errand, to order Miss Chase to go on a commission for him which was decidedly outside of her province, and which she found it necessary to refuse to do.

"I've got to have a lawyer here to look over these papers—just run over to Merl's office, Miss Chase, and ask him to step in here."

Nelda glanced up from her letter-writing in considerable surprise. Russell was not looking at her; his eyes were frowningly fixed upon the legal papers spread out upon his desk. She was alone with him, for Miss Baer had gone away on a week's vacation.

As she neither spoke nor rose to obey his

order, he suddenly turned his head and met her eye.

"Well? Why don't you go?" he asked, in the cold, quiet manner which she always found so crushing. Virginia, she knew, could never have been cowed by this man for an instant; but it was only by summoning all her forces to her aid that she herself could resist her natural tendency to succumb to him when he bore down upon her.

"Even you, Mr. Russell, can astonish me sometimes," she said, with outward calm, though her heart was beating fast; for, as has been said, it was no small undertaking to oppose him.

"Astonish you? Well, we need not discuss that. Just take your hat and make haste, will you? Tell Merl to come over here at once."

Nelda kept her seat; "I am afraid you will have to find some one else to do that errand."

"Not at all. I am quite satisfied to have you do it. Come, don't let us have any airs,—I've no time to lose."

"I can't go to that public office for you, Mr. Russell."

"Can't?" he said, ominously. "Ah? And why?"

"If you were a gentleman," she answered, suddenly flushing up with something of Virginia's haughtiness of manner, "you would not ask a lady to do such a thing."

"But mill-office clerks are not usually considered 'ladies,'" he coolly returned. "You forget your place, my young woman."

"It is you who forget my place, Mr. Russell."

"Now, then, we shall waste no more words. Let us see you start!"

"You did not understand me—I said I could not go."

"Very well. Either you do exactly as I tell you to do, or—you lose a week's wages."

"If you keep back my money, I shall report your robbery to Mr. Hyde," she said, her lips trembling at her own temerity.

Russell was staggered for a moment; but he rallied at once. He answered her with cutting deliberateness, and a brutality of look and tone which made her wince with an inward shudder, though she did not at all understand the real implication of his words;

"When I shall tell Mr. Hyde that either he upholds me in punishing your insubordination, or loses my services, do you flatter yourself that he is going to hesitate as to which of us two he will lose? And whatever *claim* you may have upon his forbearance, be assured it can't outweigh the value he places upon the superintendent of his mills."

"Mr. Hyde values justice, I am sure, even more than he values your services, Mr. Russell.

I am not in the least afraid to submit our case to him."

"The 'justice' of your claims upon his indulgence may be as strong," Russell said, with a chilling sneer, "as your evident confidence in your power over him. But I am inclined to think that you overrate both, for I have known Warren Hyde a bit longer than you have, my gay girl!"

Nelda stared at him in some bewilderment, and he saw to his chagrin, almost to his amusement, that his intended insults were no more comprehended by her, than they would have been had he spoken in Sanscrit; his language was to her an unknown tongue.

Before she could answer, there was a knock on the door; it opened, and Hyde himself walked into the room.

"Good-morning," he said, including them both in his greeting. Russell rose to give him a chair, his face looking a little blank at the untimely intrusion. A moment longer, and he would have "had Miss Chase just where she belonged;" it was very provoking that his purpose should be thus nipped.

"Do you know, Russell, I think we had better have Merl over here to see about those papers," Hyde said, when he was seated. "Suppose you send across the street for him. Where is the office-boy?"

"Gone to Black's with those bills you gave me this morning. I was just about to send for Merl, myself."

"Have you any one else to send? Who was going for you?"

"Miss Chase can be spared."

Hyde darted a look of surprise at him, and dismissed the proposal with a short laugh. "Can't you speak down the tube to one of the boys in number three? Or tell me the name of one and I'll speak."

"They are unusually busy to-day, Hyde. Their work ought not to be interrupted."

"Perhaps you had better go yourself?"

"Can't possibly. I have to finish inspecting these papers and make several calculations."

"Then I shall have to go, it seems. You ought to have two office-boys here, if one is not enough."

"Why don't you ask Miss Chase to go?" Russell again ventured, a slow color rising to his face; his defeat in the girl's very presence roused in him a resentment as deep as it was secret.

Hyde glanced at him with a flash of indignation; "Why do you waste breath in suggesting absurdities?" he answered, abruptly.

He rose and turned to the door. "I shall have Merl here," he said, with his hand on the knob, "in a few minutes."

When Nelda and Russell were again alone together, the latter turned slowly in his revolving chair until he faced her. She was looking a little excited, as she sat with her elbow resting on her desk and her forehead against her hand. He fixed his eyes upon her with an expression more relentlessly cruel than she had ever before seen on his countenance.

"You and Hyde do seem to have an excellent understanding between you," he said, with a coarse laugh. "I suppose you can well afford to have your wages docked! You don't lose anything!"

He was determined to insult her into resigning. "I will have no clerk here," he thought, with suppressed rage, "who has the cinch on me that she has!" He felt secure from any evil consequences to himself from the policy he was pursuing, for of course it would be impossible for the girl to complain to Hyde of the language he was using to her.

Nelda did not answer him. She took up her pen and turned to her letters. She did not understand him—he seemed to be talking at random—and she determined to have no more to say to him; but she looked for Mr. Hyde's return as to a goal of safety and protection.

"How incredibly stupid she is!" thought Russell. "Is it quite impossible to penetrate through her ignorance? How could I make

myself more plain? If she realized what I was saying to her, she would refuse to work here another day! Well," he concluded, "I shall have to try again!"

"Drop that work for a minute, will you, and hear me out," he said to her. "We may as well settle this matter and——"

"The matter has been settled—to my satisfaction," she answered, keeping her eyes on her letters; "and I don't care to hear anything more about it."

"There is this, however, to say about it—your character is compromised to that extent that——"

Again the door opened and Mr. Hyde, preceded by the young lawyer, Mr. Merl, walked into the office.

As the two men came across the room to Russell's desk, Hyde's eyes met Nelda's for an instant, and he marveled a little at the look she gave him. "As though appealing to me for help!" he thought, with a thrill. "Has that dog Russell been abusing her?"

Mr. Merl shook hands with Nelda—his little boy was a pupil in Virginia's school—and then he and Russell gave their attention to the legal documents on the desk.

"When you are ready for my signature," said Hyde, "let me know."

He moved away from them to take a chair at Nelda's side.

She had resumed her writing, but he noticed, as he sat down, that her hand was trembling. He deliberately laid his own upon it and took her pen from her fingers.

"Let the letter rest for a few minutes," he said, speaking in a low voice so that he should not disturb the lawyer and Russell; "and amuse me while I wait for those documents."

"Don't you know," she said, trying to smile, but failing lamentably, "that the best way to reduce one to a state of insipidity, is just to order one to be amusing?"

"It would take more than that to reduce you to 'a state of insipidity'—in my eyes! Now tell me what is the matter?"

"Why do you ask that?" she inquired, uneasily. "What *is* the matter?"

"Come, come—I won't have my questions parried! Don't you know that I am 'an austere man, reaping where I have not sown'—and that I dare not be trifled with? You can't deny to my keen eye, that something '*is* the matter.' Now what is it?"

"Mr. Russell and I were having a bit of a dispute," she replied, perforce.

"Am I going to hear what it was about?"

"Before you came in this morning he had been insisting upon my going for Mr. Merl."

"Not seriously? The cad!" Hyde muttered. "And yet," he added, leaning his elbow on the desk and looking at her curiously, "do you know, most girls in your place, would succumb in any dispute with Russell. He has a little way of cowing people, I know. You would not give in to him?"

He asked the question with an interest, almost an eagerness, which Nelda thought strange.

"Of course I could not do such an errand as that," she replied.

"But some girls would have—Russell could have made them. You are tenacious—I might almost say a little obstinate—when you take a stand. I wonder now," he speculated, half closing his eyes, "if I should be better pleased to hear you had obeyed him."

"But surely," she quickly asked, looking puzzled, "you would not have had me go over to that lawyer's public office?"

"Of course if you had gone I should have killed Russell. With slow tortures, you know. But I am speaking of that tenacity of purpose which enabled you to hold out against him. I don't know that I like it in you."

"I only wish I had more of it!" she exclaimed.

"The gods forbid! I should find it necessary to deal with you as I once dealt with my young cousin, Harry Gage—cool your hot de-

termination in a barrel of refreshing rain water. When Harry now shows signs of becoming obstreperous, I have only to look at him and say, 'rain-barrel?' and a lamb is fierce beside him!"

"I could almost envy Harry Gage—you would be so delightfully remorseful afterward, for having hurt me—O yes, I know you would!"

"And the gods forbid that I should ever have to 'hurt' you!" he said with an earnestness that surprised her. "It would make me quite 'delightfully remorseful' enough to satisfy you. But—Nelda Chase—if you ever did become obstinate on my hands——" he paused, and looked at her with glowing eyes; "I am not a patient man—remember that—I cannot bear opposition!"

"But what makes you think I should ever be tempted to oppose you?" she asked, meeting his eyes with the confidence of a child. "Now if *you* had insisted upon my going for Mr. Merl, I should have gone; because I should have known that you would not tell me to do any thing I ought not to do."

"Is that the kind of confidence you have in me?" he demanded, with controlled impetuousness. "You believe I would not ask you to do any thing wrong?"

Sensitive to the most delicate shades in the tones of his voice, as she had grown to be, she could not fail to feel a new meaning in its in-

tensity at this moment. There crossed her mind a suspicion of the true drift of his questions; but though she put the idea from her as impossible, yet her eyes wavered in meeting his, and her face grew flushed.

"I am sure," she said, constrainedly, "you would not wish me to do any thing wrong."

"Little Evader! That is not answering my question. Would you feel sure that any thing I did ask you to do, must be right for you to do?"

"No! I don't—I am not—sure that I should!" She turned away from him and nervously picked up a letter she had written that morning. "O by the way," she hastily asked, her face brightening a little at this chance of escape from his inquisition, "please read this letter, Mr. Hyde, and tell me if it is what you want; Mr. Russell said it must be submitted to you before it is sent."

He took it from her hand and laid it down on the exact spot from which she had taken it up. "Send it. It will do. I don't care if it wrecks the business! What I want to know——"

"Please read it," she persisted, pushing it toward him again, "and *do* not discuss, in this office, the psychological relation of my feminine conscience to your masculine, infallible wisdom!"

"See me," he said, as he obediently took up the envelope, "poor henpecked that I am! I am beginning to believe in the Subjection of Woman; for where she is not subjected, man is!"

He leaned back in his chair and spread open the sheet. She watched him as he bent his attention upon it and read it through. It was a long letter, and occasionally he chuckled a little over some point or other.

"Now see here," he said, suspiciously, when he had finished, "you gave me this to read that I might see how clever you are, didn't you? It is a masterpiece! I couldn't have written it! The way you take up your points——"

"The question is, will it do?" she interposed. "Is that what you want said?"

"O yes, I suppose it will do," he answered, tucking it into its envelope. "It would do better if it had been written by some one else than you, however."

"How do you mean?" she asked.

"You are becoming too horribly business-like! Any one would think a man had written that. This office is having a bad effect upon you. A kind of school for independence, opposition, strength of character, and all those things which never did appeal to me very much in women. I really think I shall have to discharge you before you become quite spoiled!

But seriously," he continued, "first-class letters like that come too cheap at fifteen dollars a week. They ought to command a higher price —even according to the law of supply and demand, and not to mention justice. I shall have to tell Russell to raise your salary, for I simply will not be so much in your debt—and that is what I am when I consent to accept such letters at the rate of fifteen dollars a week. There, there," he ended, running his hand through his hair, "I know you are shrivelling all up internally, at my discussing money with you—I won't do so any more!"

"My salary is six dollars a week, not fifteen," Nelda explained to him, "and I have never thought it too small—that is, not too small for my *work*."

Hyde stared at her for a moment in silence.

"Six dollars?" he presently murmured. "'Not fifteen.' And you do not consider 'six dollars' too small for your '*work?*' That implies that you do consider it too small for some other circumstances of your position here? I can imagine so!"

He leaned a little forward and spoke to her rapidly;

"Do you know what I am realizing at this moment? My brutality in having subjected you, all these weeks, to the society of that man! But believe me, my little friend—it has

not been thoughtlessness on my part that has made me let you suffer. I have wondered earnestly enough how I might spare you the kind of misery I knew you must endure here with him. But until very recently, I have been unable to see any way of saving you that you would not refuse to accept. Just lately, however, I *have* seen a means. And to-day it shall be used!"

He rose and walked around to Russell's desk.

"Are you not ready, yet, for my signature?" he asked.

"Just ready at this moment," Merl answered.

Hyde took up a pen and having glanced over the papers, signed. The documents were consigned to the safe; and Merl picked up his hat to go.

"Give me a little more of your time, Merl, can you?" said Hyde. "Just sit down again, please. I think there is further business for you here this morning."

"No," said Russell, in some surprise, "there is nothing more, Hyde, for Merl to do."

Hyde turned his eyes full upon Russell's face. Nelda, watching him from her desk, felt her heart beat with a vague apprehension.

"Russell, what salary does Miss Chase receive?"

"Fifteen dollars, as you know, Hyde," Russell

calmly answered, looking at his questioner without the quiver of an eyelash.

"Produce your books, if you please, and prove it."

"Certainly."

Russell promptly opened his account book and turned it around that Hyde might read the page on which were written Nelda's receipts for the past two or three months.

Hyde examined the page carefully. Of course it confirmed Russell's assertion. Nelda's name was signed to nearly a dozen receipts for amounts of fifteen dollars and upwards.

"Miss Chase," said Hyde, "will you come here, please, and tell me if this is your handwriting? It looks like it."

Nelda rose and came to his side.

"Yes," she said, as she looked at the book, "that is my signature. But—I never received those amounts of money."

"But you surely did not sign receipts for amounts which you did not receive?" Hyde asked.

"I never looked to see what I was signing. Mr. Russell always held his blotter over the page, and I never doubted that I was putting my name to a receipt for just what I was receiving."

Russell gave a short laugh; "A likely tale! A grown woman who would sign a dozen re-

ceipts, not knowing what she was signing, would deserve to lose money! What do you mean, Miss Chase?"

Nelda did not answer. She looked distressed and embarrassed.

"Here is one receipt for forty-five dollars for three weeks' work. I suppose that was for the fortnight that Miss Chase was away and the first week after her return?" Hyde asked, glancing at Russell.

The latter nodded, looking at the proprietor with an expression of conscious integrity which could endure with fortitude any absurd charges that dishonest clerks might try to bring against him.

"How much of this forty-five dollars was paid you, Miss Chase, at the end of the first week after your return from the seaside?"

"Six dollars," Nelda answered, in a low voice.

"You were not paid for the two weeks that you were not here?"

"No—I did not expect to be."

"Did you pocket thirty-nine dollars out of the forty-five, Russell?"

"Hyde," said Russell, rising, "why do you see fit to insult me like this? Have you ever found me cheating you? Why should Miss Chase's word be taken before mine? Her case would certainly carry no weight in a court of

law. Here are her receipts; she acknowledges her signature; what more can you want?"

"This morning, Russell," Hyde continued, ignoring his protest, "I had an interview with my house agent who informed me of a little way you have of holding back wages for rents. Who ever gave you authority to do any thing of the sort?"

"And many a dollar I've saved you, Hyde, by just that little move!"

"I was told by the house agent that you once kept back Miss Chase's salary on such a plea—saying that I had authorized your doing so!"

"You do authorize me to manage the business and pay the wages."

"I never made you collector of house-rents. You knew you were going beyond the limits of your authority in doing anything of that sort. I have repeatedly given you to understand that lenient, not stringent, measures must be used in these mills."

"If you understood business better, you would know how necessary it is to be strict in the discipline of a vast concern like this."

"I understand that my 'business' is to be merciful and just and generous. Again, I have forbidden any 'docking' of wages for anything but misconduct and really culpable carelessness. But by inquiry among the hands, I have re-

cently found that you have deliberately ignored my prohibition in this respect. In short, Russell," he concluded, lightly striking the desk with a ruler he held, "your game is up. I won't have a thief on my premises. The fact is," Hyde went on, "I didn't intend to face you with these things this morning—I had meant to let my investigations and discoveries ripen much more fully, before I confronted you with them. But there is really no reason why I should let your proceedings go on for another hour. My entirely accidental discovery of your robbery of Miss Chase, brings me quite to the end of my forbearance, and to-day I must, metaphorically speaking, have your blood!"

Russell laughed easily; "You are not quite a fool, Hyde! How can the business go on without me at the helm, I should like to know?"

"Don't let that matter make you nervous—my interests will really not suffer so much as you seem to fear. As I have said, I have been anticipating this crisis; and I have a man quite ready to take your place, who understands the business thoroughly, and can step into your shoes so neatly that I shall not be the loser of a dollar, by the transfer. Now, then, if you have any parting word to say, make it brief."

Russell's face had grown pale and his mouth set. But he answered steadily; "You are fa-

cetious, Hyde. I have too high an opinion of your common sense to believe you would be so unreasonable as to listen to the tattling and complaints of the ignorant working people employed here and let them weigh against my years of faithful service in your interests."

"Let us not misuse terms," Hyde corrected. "Your 'years of service' were for your own interest. As to the 'faithful'—you have been unfaithful to me every day, every hour, that you have been here. You have constantly acted in a way that you knew I strongly disapproved. You have deceived me basely. My blame, however, is not all for you—I am myself culpable enough in having been too careless of my affairs, and—like Miss Chase—too confident of other people's integrity. She is to blame for her credulity in having signed papers without looking at them—as I am to blame for having trusted you without ever having looked after you."

"Then you mean to tell me," Russell asked, with white lips, "that I am discharged?"

"That is the impression I have been endeavoring to convey," Hyde answered.

"When does the dismissal take effect?"

"Now."

"Without any notice? You can't do it, Hyde. I am employed by the year. Eh, Merl?"

The young lawyer had been listening with fixed but neutral attention; he had not committed himself, by look or word, to either side of the case; he was waiting cautiously until he should see clearly how it was all going to terminate.

"If just cause can be shown," he said, provisionally, "why the contract should be broken——"

"If we went to law about it, Russell, you might land in the penitentiary. I have not the least desire to punish you in that way. I shall pay you the remainder of your year's salary, deducting the amounts I know you to have stolen in the past year from my other employees (for of course their losses must be made up to them) and then you must take yourself off. The new superintendent will take his place at your desk this afternoon. Such disloyalty and dishonesty as yours deserves no consideration—not even as much as I am giving you."

"You can't deduct any thing from my year's salary," declared Russell, indignantly, "for you can't prove that I have appropriated a penny! A court of law would pronounce a woman too imbecile to testify, who signed a dozen receipts without looking at the sum for which she was signing! The story is false on the face of it! Speak up, Merl—is there any case at all against me?"

"No legal case," answered Merl, hesitatingly, "unless we have witnesses who——"

"Very well," interrupted Hyde. "You may go to law about it if you want to. Sue me for your full salary for the year. Do as you like. But one thing is certain—fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians—you go from this office this morning with a check for the amount which I see fit to pay you—and you return no more. Only just bear this in mind—if there is any law suit about the matter, some of the foremen of the mills will have some things to testify of you which won't sound well in court."

The force of this last argument seemed to penetrate Russell's conscience. His eyes relaxed their fixed stare into Hyde's. He answered nothing.

The proprietor took up a pencil and bent over the desk to make a rapid calculation.

"In the past week," he said, "I have accurately traced to your pocketbook, twenty-five hundred dollars which never belonged there (not counting the using of my workmen to do work on your private premises and other similar defections) adding to this the one hundred and forty-seven dollars of which you have robbed Miss Chase, we have two thousand six hundred and forty-seven dollars to be deducted from your annual salary of five thousand dollars; and this leaves a balance due you

of two thousand three hundred and fifty-three dollars."

He took a check book from his pocket and filled out a blank.

"There," he said, handing it to Russell, "go. And," he added, gravely, "sin no more."

And Lewis Russell went.

CHAPTER XXV.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon of that same day. Bishop Osborn and Warren Hyde, sitting in the Bishop's study in the diocesan house, had been quoting their favorite passages of Dante's *Vita Nuova;* talking of the immortal significance of the *Divina Commedia;* and now were discussing the portrait of the poet supposed to have been made by Giotto.

"I think Carlyle, in looking upon that portrait," said Hyde, "read into it all the loneliness, the deathless sorrow and pain, the tragedy, the pride, the stern, implacable rigor, of his own mournful soul! 'The face of one wholly in protest,' he writes of it, 'and lifelong, unsurrendering battle against the world.' There is a picture of Thomas Carlyle himself."

"With the moral greatness of Dante," answered the Bishop, "and also with the bitter sadness of his protesting spirit, Carlyle felt himself in such complete sympathy, that it is no wonder if he did translate himself into the portrait."

Hyde suddenly laughed; "Miss Nelda Chase calls Carlyle 'a Scotchy old curmudgeon!'"

This mention of Nelda carried the Bishop at a bound, to the point to which he had meant to

carefully steer their talk before Hyde should leave him. He had purposed to lead up to it gradually and delicately, if possible. But he seemed to realize, all at once, that with a man like Hyde directness was the only method possible.

He rose abruptly and closed the door that opened into the hall; and before sitting down again, he drew his chair nearer to his friend's.

Hyde looked at him in some surprise.

"Warren," said the Bishop, earnestly, as he leaned back in his chair, "are you sufficiently my friend to bear some candid speaking from me?"

Hyde's keen eyes regarded him for a moment before he answered.

"Go on," he presently said, quietly.

"If you were another sort of man, I should not venture to intrude my word of advice in a matter which you will probably consider none of my business. But I have enough confidence in your justice and manliness to feel that you will not misunderstand my interference."

"My 'justice and manliness?' Is that a sop to Cerberus?"

"I think too highly of you (if not of myself) to throw sops to you. To come to my point at once:—Warren, have you never stopped to consider that you may possibly be wrecking the happiness of Nelda Chase?"

"How?"

"Is it necessary for me to explain?"

"Yes. I do not understand. Unless," he deliberately added, his lips growing a little pale, "unless (since candor is in order) you think that having wrecked one woman's happiness, I have proven myself incapable of taking care of the happiness of another."

"You can't suppose that Nelda would marry you? If you do, you don't know the child. She would die rather than marry you. That is why you are in danger of wrecking her happiness—for you are doing every possible thing to make her love you."

"Why should she not marry me?" he asked, in the same quiet voice. "Before God and the law there is no barrier."

"Before God?"

"Surely you, Bishop, are not a bigot about divorce?" Hyde sharply questioned.

"I think that before God you are a married man."

"I am not. Yes—I am. My soul is wedded to Nelda Chase."

"Once it was wedded to Edith Prince. The sacred marriage tie can *not* be lightly broken!"

"It was Nature that broke our union—violently, ruthlessly."

The Bishop looked at the pale face before him, and for a space he was silent.

"If," he presently said, "I did not know Mrs. Hyde as I do,—if I had never come into touch with her rare, beautiful character—I should probably, with my knowledge of you, trust in the righteousness of your purpose to annul your first marriage by entering into another. But I have known her—I have realized what a true and loving wife she must have been to you—and," he gravely added, "I have seen her suffering. And, Hyde, I feel that the man who has wronged and wounded her——"

Hyde rose abruptly and walked away from the Bishop to the other end of the room. He came back in a moment, and slowly paced the floor before the hearth near where the Bishop sat. The latter felt that perhaps he had gone too far. He waited in silence for his friend to speak.

Presently Hyde stopped and stood before him, his hands clasped behind him, while he looked down intently into Osborn's face.

"You don't know whereof you speak, Bishop. Listen to me—I am going to marry Nelda Chase. You say I do not know Nelda if I hope to persuade her to marry me. But I say you do not know me, if you think I can be foiled in winning what I covet—what I covet," he repeated in a tone of suppressed intensity, "with the strength of my life!"

It crossed the Bishop's mind that even Nelda's

Puritanical prejudices, deep-rooted as he knew them to be, might possibly succumb before a determination so strong as that which he now read in this man's countenance and tones.

"Let us understand one another, Bishop," Hyde calmly added. "Are you going to use your influence with Nelda to make my task harder for me—my herculean task of persuading her that it is not her duty to refuse to give herself to the man to whom God hath joined her by a bond more sacred than that which priests and aldermen can make? Are you?"

"No need that I should say a word to strengthen Nelda Chase in her faithfulness to her conscience."

"Then you promise not to influence her?"

"Of course I will bind myself by no promise. But I repeat—my interference will not be necessary."

There was a knock on the door and the Bishop's two children, followed by their aunt, came into the room.

Hyde was not sorry for the interruption; after a few minutes, he took his leave.

On his way home, he meditated earnestly upon the talk they had had. And the result of his cogitation was that by the time he reached his house, he had made up his mind to go that evening to call upon his divorced wife.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT eight o'clock that evening Warren Hyde walked through the garden of Mr. Prince's home on Second Street, and going to a side door, he let himself into the house with a latch-key.

Every association that he had with this home—the scene of his happy courtship and brilliant marriage—was so painful to him that his rare visits here seemed like epochs in his life.

The apartment into which he now stepped was a prettily furnished little sitting-room. It did not look like a general family room, but seemed rather to be a private apartment used exclusively by one woman; and such indeed it was, as Hyde well knew. No one ever intruded upon Mrs. Hyde here, except her child and—at long intervals—the father of her child.

Finding the room empty, just now, he went across the floor to a door, opposite the one by which he had entered the house. He knocked on it softly. There was no answer, and after a moment he opened it.

It led into a large nursery. A lamp burning on a table against the wall, was hidden by a screen from the little brass bed which stood in the farthest corner of the room. Beside the

table, sat a nursery maid, in cap and apron, reading a paper novel, in which she had been too absorbed to hear his light knock.

He stepped in and carefully closed the door behind him. The maid started up with a cry, as the dark shadow of his figure fell across her book.

"Oh!" she breathed, holding her hand to her heart, "it's you, Mr. Hyde! You gave me sich a turn, sir! I thought," she added, with a nervous laugh, "that you was the black hearted willyan in this here book, if you'll 'xcuse me sayin' so!"

"Mrs. Hyde is home this evening?"

"Yes, sir. She's at dinner."

"And little Prince?"

"He's well as usual, sir. He's sleepin' in the crib there. He's got stronger since his nursery's been moved down here, for he plays more out in the sunshine on the pyazzy. He's out there sometimes in the mornin' with his mamma 'fore I can get him his breakfast."

"And you are sure he is getting stronger? Take good care of him, Mita," he said, taking a gold coin from his pocket and putting it in her hand.

"Thank you, sir," she said, her eyes dancing; "I'm sure so much as this here—I didn't expect so much—I'll do my best, sir, and——"

"Has Mrs. Hyde company to-night?"

"Mr. Lewis Russell's dinin' here, sir."

Hyde compressed his lips for a moment before he spoke again.

"You may go, now, and let Mrs. Hyde know I am here. Be careful, Mita, you know."

"Yes, sir, I know."

"And you need not come back again. Leave me alone with Prince."

"Yes, sir."

When she had gone, he removed the light coat which he wore over his evening dress, and laying it across the screen, he walked softly to the crib in the corner, and sat down in an arm-chair beside it. He leaned forward, his chin resting upon his hand, to watch the face of his sleeping child. His stern features softened to a wonderful tenderness as he gazed at the little face upon the pillow. An odd looking child he was; thick, straight black hair like his father's; prominent temples in which the blue veins showed through the transparent skin; a brow too old and wise to match the baby mouth—for it was the strong brow of his father, and the innocent, sweet mouth of his mother, and the combination seemed strangely incongruous. He was a handsome boy, lying thus covered so that the hump in his back was concealed.

"With such a set of features," thought the father, "into what kind of a character will he develop? Not an ordinary one, that is certain.

The mouth suggests too little sturdiness to match that head. He has brains—but I doubt if he will ever have great force of character. I may be mistaken, though. It is Edith's mouth, and gentle as she is, she does not lack decision. Emerson had a mild mouth; so has Osborn, rather; so has Nelda; yet none of them lack force. I need not look for an iron jaw like mine on every man of strength of will."

He bent a little nearer and softly touched the child's hair. The boy stirred a bit; moved the hand which was thrust under his cheek on the pillow; and suddenly drew his other hand from under the covers and flung it out upon the bed. When, after a moment, he lay quiet again, Hyde slipped his forefinger under the thin hand which lay on the cover. The child clasped it instinctively, and the feeling of the little fingers upon his, seemed to send a thrill up his arm to his very brain.

"Ah, my boy," he mused, "I fear Nelda cannot forgive your existence, even if she can ever forgive your Mother's. And yet—though you are an impediment in the way of my realizing the thing that with all my heart and mind and strength I desire—yet I love you well, my little lad!"

The child's lips moved and Hyde thought, for a moment, that he was going to wake up; but he became still again and slept on.

"A few years hence, what will he think of his parents?" the father wondered. "Will he ever know the truth about us? Little innocent victim! Nature is very cruel! Yes, cruel! According to man's sense of justice, the sins of the parents should not be visited upon the children! My poor boy! The sin of *your* parents must follow you through life in your misshapen little body! And God knows what other distortions may lurk in your brain and heart!"

Suddenly the child's waxy eyelids were lifted, and his deep, still, black eyes looked quietly and without surprise into his father's. Hyde waited for the boy to speak, for he almost doubted whether he were really awake, so motionless he lay.

"Did oo tum to see me to-day, Fahdy?"

The baby talk, like the innocent mouth, did not match the deep, quiet look of the dark eyes; for the latter would have seemed more fitting in the head of a full-fledged seer, than in that of an infant.

"Yes, little son," said Hyde, as he bent to press his lips to those of the child. "Are you glad to see Father?"

"'Ess," answered the boy, looking with supreme content into the face bending over him. "Me 'ike oo, Fahdy."

"That is my dear boy! And whom else do you like, Prince?"

"'Ike Mamma. And Dwanpa."

"Where is Mamma, now—do you know?"

"Mamma at beksup"—which being interpreted, meant "breakfast," the name by which Prince indiscriminately called all meals. "Mamma says s'e tum to P'ince affer beksup an' te' me 'bout 'ittle fwogs in a pon'. Tan *oo* te' me 'bout dat, Fahdy?"

"Well," said Hyde, doubtfully, "I can try, my darling. Do you want me to hold you? Yes? Well, then, let Father wrap you in this shawl."

"Dat Mamma's s'awl what s'e put on herse'f when s'e do's out wif P'ince in de darden. Pitty!" he said, smoothing its soft, white folds as his father wrapped it about him.

Hyde lifted him in his arms and sat down again with him, in the armchair beside the bed. He handled him with a sort of fearful carefulness, for he was almost afraid to touch him lest his man's strength should jar or hurt the frail child.

"Here we are now, little man, snug and comfortable," he said, gently pushing the heavy hair from the boy's white, broad forehead, and looking down into the fine little face on his arm with a tenderness which transformed his own strong countenance.

"Fahdy," said Prince, returning his look intently, "does oo 'ike Mamma?"

Hyde checked the sudden start which the question gave him. He answered, quietly;

"Yes, dear, I love your Mamma."

"One day Mamma 'ooked at Fahdy's pikshur and s'e kwy!" Prince said, his eyes growing big. "What made Mamma kwy when s'e 'ooked at Fahdy's pikshur?"

"Perhaps she wanted Father to come to see her," Hyde answered, feeling that he was not clever at meeting the questions of the keen baby; and indeed, his answer did not seem to satisfy the little querist.

"Fahdy's pikshur a'ways make Mamma sahwy," he said. "P'ease, Fahdy, take dat pikshur away."

"Does Mamma look at it often?"

"Ev'y day. But s'e didn't kwy on'y once. But Mamma 'ook sahwy ev'y day when s'e sees it."

There was a small portrait of himself hanging over the child's crib. He had brought it from Italy and had asked Edith to keep it in his little son's room. He had not foreseen such an effect upon her of the constant presence of that very life-like face on the wall.

"She must not keep it here unless she can conceal her feelings from Prince," he thought. "Perhaps she does not realize how precociously he observes her."

She did realize it, however; but nothing

would have induced her to remove the portrait from the room when he had asked her to keep it there.

"Now, Fahdy, p'ease te' me 'bout de 'ittle fwogs in a pon'," the boy pleaded.

Hyde mustered his powers and proceeded to experiment in an occupation new to him. He was not very sure of himself, but Prince's expressive face was a pretty true guide to him as to when he was or was not giving satisfaction. Indeed, before he had gone very far, he was told that though his fwogs in de pon' were not like Mamma's at all, they were if possible even more entrancing.

He had just reached a thrilling climax, in which an heroic and adventurous frog was escaping the tragic fate of being trodden upon by a monster ox coming to the pond to drink—when there was a knock at the nursery door, and Mita came in.

"Please, sir, 'xcuse me interruptin', but Mrs. Hyde is waitin' for you in her sittin'-room; an' I'll stay with Prince."

The child manifested a tendency to cry at his father's going; but the promise of another visit very soon again, if he would "be a good boy and go to Mita," made him submit.

Hyde went, then, into the sitting-room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SHE was standing beside a mantlepiece, her elbow leaning upon it, and her forehead resting against her hand. She wore a dinner gown of violet silk, a few violets in her hair, and a bunch of them at her breast. She was very lovely.

So he thought, as he came across the room to her. The fuller womanhood that had come to her in her motherhood, and in her deep sorrows, had enriched and spiritualized the girlhood beauty that he had loved.

Without moving from her position, and without the shadow of a change in the pale, still look of her face, she held out her hand to him as he came to her side; he clasped it for a moment as he looked down at her. In the midst of other conflicting feelings and thoughts, it occurred to him to marvel at his own character, that having once loved this woman, he had, in separating from her, been capable of becoming absorbed with the thought of another. That Nelda was in so many ways Edith's peer and counterpart did in some measure perhaps explain the new passion of his life. Indeed, in view of all the facts of the case, he could scarcely, after all, much wonder at himself.

"Russell is with your father in the dining-room?" he asked, as he too, in standing before her, leaned his elbow on the mantlepiece. His manner toward her was reserved, but far from cold; and his eyes in resting upon her were gentle.

"Yes," she answered.

"And shall you have to join them presently in the parlor?"

"No. I am at your service as long as you please. Lewis comes here so often—I don't treat him formally."

"Has he told you," Hyde quietly inquired, "of my discharging him to-day?"

She seemed surprised; "He told me he had resigned. And," she slowly added, looking up into Warren's eyes, "he told me why."

"I am compelled to doubt that. What reason did he give?"

She did not answer at once. Presently she said, speaking low; "What is it you have come to see me for to-night?"

"Must I always have a special mission to excuse my coming to see you?"

Her eyes drooped, and she was silent.

"And my question?" he said. "What reason did Russell give for—'resigning,' as he is pleased to put it?"

"He gave me two reasons. I don't care to discuss either of them with you, Warren. The

first was an obnoxious one. The second—it is for you to speak of that."

"The first was that he wanted to marry you, and felt he could not gracefully remain in my employ as the husband of—my divorced wife?"

His compelling tone and look forced her reply;

"Yes."

"But why did he resign before he had your answer? I am hardly mistaken, am I, in assuming that you refused him?"

"I have not refused him——" she hesitated.

"Edith?" he questioned, incredulously.

"Yet," she concluded. "Father interrupted the talk I was having with him before dinner."

"Of course you are going to refuse him?"

"Of course."

"And why do you suppose he was so rash as to resign before proposing—running the risk of losing his very lucrative situation in my mills without gaining any thing by it?"

"But he had another reason——"

"Yes. Now we come to that. Well?"

"I don't care to speak of it, Warren."

There was an instance's silence; then he said in his tone of quiet firmness,

"I wish you to speak of it, Edith."

She flushed sensitively. But she obeyed him.

"He told me Miss Chase presumed upon her privileges as—your betrothed—and made things

intolerable for him—that she even meddled with the books to get him into trouble, and that he had no redress, because you would not hear a word against her."

Hyde's face had grown set. "Did you believe all that?"

"How could I know? I am not acquainted with Miss Chase."

"Lewis Russell is a scoundrel, Edith. You must forbid his visits here. He has stolen several thousands from me and from my employees. He has appropriated the wages of day-laborers. He has, for twelve weeks, stolen nine dollars a week, from Nelda Chase. I discharged him this morning. He fought against it. But he saw that he had no case, and that discretion was the only card he could play with safety. So he went. I could have sent him to the penitentiary, but I had no wish to punish him. Some day I shall give you the details of his villainy. But to-night, I don't want to speak more of it."

She gazed at him in pained astonishment. She was immeasurably shocked to hear of such perfidy on the part of this lifelong acquaintance whose integrity she had never had the least occasion to doubt.

"You are sure of all that?" she asked.

"Do you doubt an assertion I make so unhesitatingly?" he asked, gravely. "I can give

you full proof if you wish it—but spare me the necessity to-night."

"Of course," she agreed, "I know you would not say it without ample proof. But——" she hesitated again, and looked at him half appealingly.

"Miss Chase?" he said, answering the question in her face. "No, I am not engaged to her. But—I want to speak of her to you."

For a moment the room was so still that the ticking of the clock seemed clamorous.

Edith's eyes became heavy and her countenance unutterably mournful. He watched her with painful intentness. His face was pale, and it seemed sternly to reflect the sadness in hers.

"Edith, you are making it bitterly hard for me! Don't look so!"

There was a pitying, loving note in his voice that seemed to thrill her, but she lifted her head as though to repel it.

"I am unreasonable, I know," she said, wearily. "I suppose I shall get over this—this feeling—it seems to bring back those first dreadful days of our parting—I don't know why. And I know I am inconsistent—there is no reason why I should be unhappy in your marrying again."

"So it seems to me. You and I are hopelessly parted. Why should we not form new ties?"

"'We?'" she repeated. "I? No."

"Why?"

She did not answer.

"You certainly do not still love me—in the old way? That is not possible."

"Oh!" she breathed, turning her face away from him and resting her forehead on her palm; "Love you? My heart wore itself out with loving you—and I have no heart now—except for my boy!"

"With that quivering face before me, you tell me you have no heart? You can still suffer at least. And if you can suffer you can love."

She shook her head; "When a woman has once given the love of her whole soul to a strong man like you, she can never afterward love a lesser man. And most men—even better men than you—dwindle beside you. No—I can never love again."

Once more a silence fell between them. And this time it was long continued. Each mind was busy with its memories, its emotions, its conflicts.

At last she looked up and spoke; her voice was subdued.

"What is it you came to tell me of Miss Chase?"

"That I fear she will not consent to marry a —divorced man."

"While his wife is living. Do you want me

to eat some poison? You never did allow trifling obstacles to stand in the way of your wishes and purposes, Warren."

He looked at her gravely.

"I did not think," he said, slowly, "that you would feel it in this way."

Her lips quivered, her eyes glistened with bright tears; "Neither did I," she answered. "I always knew you would marry again—and I thought I was prepared for it—but——" she paused.

"You always knew I would marry again?" he repeated. "Why did you set up a different standard of loyalty and constancy for me from that which you held for yourself?"

"I had alienated you by my rash insistance upon a divorce. And—your love was not what mine was."

"It is unjust of you to say that, Edith."

"If it had been as mine, you could never have loved another woman."

"Do you know," he asked, solemnly, "how I came to love another woman? Nelda Chase charmed me because she reminded me of you."

Swiftly there came into the beautiful eyes raised to his face, something of their old passionate tenderness for him. But it faded like a shadow.

"That explains some things," she quietly answered, "that seemed inexplicable to me."

"And now," he said, "you know there can be but one way of overcoming the prejudices of a girl like Nelda Chase, against marrying—me."

He saw a slight quiver go over her; "One way? What is that?"

"Think a moment."

"I could never consent to it!" she half whispered. "Never, never! I could not bear it!"

"Put yourself in her place, Edith—and think again."

"Put myself in her place?" she repeated, with a sad, bitter smile. "You choose your expressions strangely."

"I think not," he answered. "I have long since accepted the fact of the rupture of your life from mine. My mind has adjusted itself to the condition. I think always of our relation as it now is—not as it once was, as you seem to do, Edith. So the expressions I choose are not strange, but most natural."

"If she is a true and noble woman, she will not marry a divorced man—and her 'prejudices' will hardly be overcome even by that means you hint of!"

"I scarcely think she is a fanatic."

"What pure-minded man, knowing the truth of my relation with you," she said, her face becoming white, "would want to marry me? And will a pure woman be less fastidious in her standard for measuring you?"

"Love is strong enough to overcome—such things," he said.

"'Such things' kill a love that is worthy the name!"

"I do not agree with you. You have come to look at these things in a distorted way—through your sufferings," he said, in a low, gentle tone; "my poor child!"

"Warren!" she pleaded, piteously, "O don't speak to me kindly, like that! I think it will kill me!"

She suddenly bent her head upon the mantelpiece and sobbed. She could sustain this strenuous strain she was undergoing no longer—his last word and tone of tenderness snapped her tense endurance.

A spasm crossed his face. That sob of long wounded love—the first he had ever heard from her—pierced his heart and broke down with a crash the icy barrier that for years they had placed between themselves. He bent over her. He drew her slight form into his strong arms and clasped her. She made no resistance. She leaned on his breast like a child who, spent with wandering, finds at last a little respite from its weary rovings.

"Dear Edith! My own darling, my beloved!" spoke his deep tones, as he pressed his lips to hers.

In this haven on his breast, where of old she

was wont to find shelter from every slightest wind of fate, she rested now, for a moment, from the wild tempests of her stormy life.

Too absorbed they both were, to hear the soft opening of the door which led out into the hall, and thence into the main part of the house. Lewis Russell stood, for a instant, on the threshold, and gazed in amazement upon the sight that met his eyes. The woman whom he expected to make his wife, clasped in the arms of the man from whom for more than three years she had been divorced!

He stepped forward into the room.

"I beg your pardon?"

They quietly drew apart, but Warren kept her hand in his, as they turned to look at the intruder.

"Your father, Mrs. Hyde, is ill—I am afraid it is a stroke—we have him on a sofa in the dining-room, and the doctor has been summoned——"

She swept past him without a word and went swiftly from the room. Not until the swish of her silk skirts had died away, down the long hall, did the two men lift their eyes to each other's faces. Then Warren spoke;

"You will leave this house, Russell,—now, at this moment—and never return to it."

"Are you the master here?" sneeringly demanded Russell.

"Yes," returned Hyde, calmly. "I am the master here. So you will go." He snapped his fingers as he spoke, as though he were talking to a dog.

Russell looked at him.

"I think I must enlighten your pretty little Nelda Chase of your doings,—I don't believe she knows she has cause to be jealous of her admirer's wife and——"

Hyde's hand was laid upon the collar of Russell's coat, and the brute suddenly felt himself shaken as though he were a rat in the clutches of a lion.

When he came to himself, he found that he was in the compromising attitude of reclining on the lawn just outside the house. He was hatless and gloveless. But he did not return indoors to reclaim his property.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHILE these little scenes were being enacted in Mr. Prince's house on Second Street, Nelda, at home in the privacy of her own room, was experiencing, with passionate intensity, her own little inner tragedy.

She had announced to Virginia that she was tired and would go to bed early; she had left her sister alone in the parlor and had withdrawn to the bedroom which they used in common; and now, robed in bath-wrapper and slippers, she was lying in a steamer chair, with fatigue and sleep far enough away from her feverish thoughts.

"Is it wrong for me to love him?" was the question which burned in her heart. "Oh! I can't ask if it is wrong—I can't help it if it *is* —I love him! I love him with every breath I draw, with every throb of my brain! It is not wrong!" she vehemently protested to her conscience. "How can it be wrong when it so lifts my life from commonplace to heavenly! when it steals every bitterness from my heart and makes me purer and better in every thought and feeling—as I know it does! I could never marry him, of course," she mur-

mured, her face growing bright with color and her eyes burning. "That is unthinkable. Surely he would not ask me to. But what does that matter, so long as I have his love—as I can't help knowing I have? O when he speaks to me with that marvelous kindness that he can sometimes put into his eyes and voice, I feel as if I could embrace the world if it had a neck! If I had been in Mrs. Hyde's place, nothing, *nothing* could ever have made me be divorced! He might have killed me, but I should have clung to him through any thing! What could have made her give up such a husband as that? O I know I'm a poor, abject thing!" she suddenly accused herself; "and haven't any 'proper pride'—but how can a woman have pride when she loves—as I love? Pride? I don't know the meaning of the word when I think of him! I could lie down at his feet and let him walk over me, as the price of having him sometimes—just sometimes—look at me with such tenderness as I have felt him capable of. Once, he must have loved *her* with all his soul. How could she give up his love and go on living afterward! For one short space in her life, what a happy woman she must have been! She is miserable now,—but I feel as if I could willingly spend a lifetime of misery for the sake of one week of such full and free happiness as she must have known as his wife,—

beloved and cherished by him! Oh! To be cherished by him! To feel his strong, protecting care—as I have felt it! To be—the mother of his children!"

She dropped her hot face into her hands and trembled. Her bosom heaved tumultuously. A sense of thrilling joy possessed her. Thought was suspended, in the wave of passionate happiness which swept over her.

But her emotional mood was abruptly broken in upon; and she descended, with a shock, from a pinnacle of bliss, to the hard remembrance of the fate which stood in the way of the realization of her beautiful dreams of blessedness.

The door opened and Virginia came into the room. She looked surprised to see Nelda not in bed.

"What are you doing?" she asked, coming to stand by her chair, as she undid the hooks of her gown. "I thought I should find you in bed asleep. Not even reading?" she questioned, noticing that Nelda held no book. "Just lying here mooning? Now, Nelda," she said, suspiciously, "of what—or I should say of whom—were you thinking? You look ridiculously sentimental!"

"I was thinking of the new superintendent of the mills," Nelda answered, unblushingly. "He is such a pleasant change after Mr. Russell."

"'God bress de Lawd!' as our old black Leviticus used to say. Words cannot express my thankfulness that you are delivered from the body of that death!"

"Don't be so blasphemous, Virginny!"

"I'm in a blasphemous mood! Let me tell you why; I stole out of the house a few minutes ago, to buy a loaf for breakfast; and a little steak, too, Nelda; I thought we could celebrate your raise to fifteen dollars a week (with a lot of back pay thrown in) by having a beefsteak breakfast."

"Don't let our wealth make you proud, Sister! Beefsteak for breakfast seems dreadful airs! But what put you into a blasphemous mood?"

"Mrs. Carlton met me and walked a block with me and—Nelda," she said, resignedly, as she slipped out of her waist and raised her beautiful bare arms to take down her hair, "we may as well give up trying to keep our private, personal affairs from the Winchester public. We may just as well consent to air our most intimate griefs and joys to every passer-by—for know them they will, whatsoever reserve we may endeavor to practice! Mrs. Carlton began by condoling with me; 'I heard some ladies discussing, the other day, how you must be overworked,' she said, 'what with your school and your housekeeping and Miss Nelda in the

Hyde woolen mills, and your two little brothers on your hands! How do you ever manage to get any good, square, nourishing meals cooked? For nothing is so important, you know, as well-cooked and abundant and so forth——.' I stopped to explain to her that we had Quig in to help us nearly every day, and Mrs. Carlton really seemed wonderfully relieved to know it. But I tell you, Nelda, I refuse to be pitied by my fellow-men! I'm too proud to endure their compassion for my 'hard lot.' I declare I mean to lead Quig by a chain, about the town with me to-morrow, to ease the natives of their solicitude on our account! Now don't begin to preach and tell me it is only their real, but crudely expressed, kindness of heart. I tell you, dear, it is their blankable vulgar curiosity, that is what it is! There, now, I feel better for saying that out! If I did not have you for a safety-valve in my trials, what should I do?"

"I will preach to you, Virginia! It is flying in the face of Providence to talk about our 'hard lot' now. We have so much to be thankful for."

"Yes," Virginia agreed, a soft glow of happiness coming into her eyes. She turned away from her sister and walked slowly about the room while she brushed her long hair. "I do feel, Nelda, as if we never, never ought to complain more! We have friends—a friend—no I

will say friends, for Mr. Hyde *is* kind to you. And we have a little more money now. And there seems to be some hope and brightness in the world that used not to be here."

Nelda watched her surreptitiously, and with secret delight. Not by look or word would she obtrude upon her reticence about her relation with the Bishop—which was, of course, the root and cause of the "hope and brightness in the world which used not to be here." She knew that all in good time, she would be told whatever there was to tell. Meanwhile, she was content to wait; for Virginia's spirits, these days, left Nelda in no doubt at all as to the inner fountain of joy that was feeding her life.

She rose from her steamer chair, threw off the bath-robe which she had put on over her nightgown, and kicking off her slippers, she got into bed; and Virginia soon followed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MONTH went by. Some sad events had meanwhile happened. Mr. Prince, stricken with paralysis, had died after a week's illness. Edith's desolation was not even then completed. The black crape on the door had scarcely been removed when it was replaced by a snowy white sign of death and mourning—for the little crippled boy was suddenly taken from his mother's arms, just when she had learned freely to find in him her life's consolation and sweetness.

It was the Bishop who first told Virginia and Nelda of little Prince Hyde's dangerous illness; for although the town was agog about the matter, and thrilling with suspense as to the possible outcome of the fact that Warren Hyde was with his divorced wife at the bedside of their dying child, yet as Virginia and Nelda seldom heard gossip of any sort, they remained quite in ignorance of this popular sensation until the matter was mentioned to them by Bishop Osborn upon his return from a fortnight's absence from home.

"The child cannot possibly live more than a

few days," he told them. "Warren and Edith are nursing him together."

The news had come to Nelda with torturingly conflicting feelings. In the first place, it explained Mr. Hyde's recent strange neglect of her; a neglect from which she had suffered some hours of very deep sadness, some heart burnings for which she saw no healing, and questionings to which she could find no answer.

But now new problems arose. Would not this sorrow reunite him to the stricken mother of his child? They were being thrown together at their boy's bedside. She was a good, beautiful, lovely woman, and he a man of tenderness and justice and truth. How otherwise could it all end than in their reconciliation? And was this not a consummation devoutly to be wished? Did she dare to breathe a prayer for any different solution of his life? Indeed there could be no other solution! No woman worthy of him would marry him while Edith lived. And he—she tried to believe that he, too, was far too noble to think of marriage with another woman. Why, then, was her heart so heavy and hopeless?

Her soul was torn by its struggle with doubts, and longings, and deep convictions of right.

"Why don't I rejoice in the possibility of their reconciliation? I am selfish and wicked!"

she grieved. "It is because his friendship will be forever lost to *me*—because I can never again see him and find my life in him, as I have learned to do so utterly! To lose him forever —it is like tearing out my heart with red hot pincers! How can I live and bear it?"

She prayed with all the religious fervor of which her soul was capable, that she might come to desire only what was true and right, and that this passionate pain which tortured her, might be transformed to joy in another's blessedness.

CHAPTER XXX.

ONE afternoon, just ten days after the funeral of their child, Edith and Warren were sitting together in her little sitting-room. He was at her side on a couch, and her hand was clasped in his. Her face was pale and pensive, and his was very melancholy. The death of his son had been a sharp blow to him.

"But our grief is selfish," he was gently telling her. "We cannot wish our poor boy back in this sad world. We must not mourn for him, dear Edith."

Great tears rolled over her cheeks; but she did not speak.

"It is you for whom I grieve most," he went on; "your double loss—your loneliness,—you are so utterly bereft——" he stopped, unable to speak.

"Not utterly," she faintly corrected him. "You have come back to me—and my life can't be altogether empty now, whatever else is taken from me. But—if you go away again—then I shall indeed be desolate!"

"Dear," he said, pressing the hand which he clasped, "we belong to each other now, as of old. Your soul was never divorced from mine!

In the dark years we have passed—with an ocean between us, a spiritual one, as well as a natural,—God only knows how I have longed for your comradeship! And—strange as it may seem to you—even in my conflicts about Nelda Chase, I was impelled almost irresistibly, to come to you in the old way, and pour out all that was in my heart! Edith, it is you that have kept us apart, not I."

"I know, O I know!" she murmured. "I have been all wrong! But—I was frantic—almost insane——"

"Don't!" he pleaded. "Let us try to forget the hideous nightmare! We are once more comrades. Let us live in the present."

"But, Warren," she questioned, half timidly, "what room will there be in your life for me when once you have taken—Nelda Chase to your heart and home?"

"I shall never take Nelda Chase to my heart and home."

He felt her hand tremble in his. He held it closer in both his own.

"I have told you, Edith, that what first made me love Nelda Chase was her resemblance to you. And——"

He hesitated a moment—and added in a deeper tone which she could not at once interpret, "One strong point of likeness between you and her, which I have long recognized as a

dormant quality in her, has lately asserted itself. You will understand what I mean when I tell you that—she refuses to marry me."

Edith started a little, and did not answer immediately.

"Is she inflexible?" she presently asked.

"As inflexible as you once were at a certain crisis in our lives!"

They were silent for a time. At last, as though with an effort, he spoke again; "Dear, you and I both know that the passion of our love for each other is dead. And yet, all our lives long, we can be staunch, helpful friends to each other. Life is hard enough at best—let us not deny ourselves the comfort and strength we each may get from the royal friendship we know that we can have."

"You are the only friend, the only comfort I have now—I cannot afford to lose you. And what better proof of my true friendship can I give you than this!" She leaned toward him with flushed, eager face; "It may seem strange and unbelievable—but my heart is fixed upon your marrying her—Nelda Chase! It seems to me that God has brought her into your life to heal its bitter disappointments! Warren, tell me all about her. Surely, she loves you?"

He bent forward and kissed with infinite tenderness, the eager face near his own.

"Edith," he said, sadly, "I used every argu-

ment to break down her prejudices. She acknowledged her love for me. I told her, then, that she blasphemed in letting a blind superstition separate us, whom God had joined. I told her," he went on, his tone gathering intensity and a suppressed passion that Edith knew so well! "I told her that you were not my wife —and could never be! 'She was once made your wife,' Nelda said. 'So she is your wife forever and ever!' 'Yes,' I acknowledged, 'she was once my wife—my soul was knit to hers as closely as it is now bound to yours; but though I believe that Edith and I were joined in that sacred union by God Himself, even as I believe that you and I are so joined now, yet it was God that put us asunder—and we are no more one flesh, but twain.' 'If you were once truly wedded,' she objected, 'in such sacred love as that which you and I now feel for each other, how could you ever grow apart? And what reason can I have for feeling sure that some day you may not put away my love?' Edith, what could I answer her?"

"You did not tell her the—truth?" she faltered.

"How could I?" he gravely asked. "I could not tell it to a girl like Nelda—she is as ignorant of evil as—as you once were. And can you think I would ever tell the wretched story without your consent?"

"I know you would not."

"I told her that if she could know the true history of my life and yours, I was sure she could not hesitate to give herself to me; and I asked her if her faith in me was too weak to trust this assurance of mine in view of the fact that I could not tell her the true story. But her only reply was, that she could not marry a divorced man whose wife was living—no matter what was the cause of the divorce. I asked her, then, why she did not count it sin to love me? She said she felt it was 'a divine and a holy thing' to love me, but she could never, never marry me."

He repeated her words reverently; and Edith, as she watched him, knew that this second great passion of his life was no less deep and true than his love for her had once been.

"And Nelda," she asked, in a low voice, "—does she suffer too?"

"As you and I have suffered," he answered. "But—it is my vehemence and pain that make her suffer. She would be content with loving me and having me love her, with no thought of marriage, if I too, could be content with that."

They sat, for a space, in thoughtful silence.

Suddenly Edith spoke; "Warren, I am going to see her."

She rose and stood before him. He, too, got up. He laid his hand on her shoulder, and

looked down into her face. "Dear, what can you do?"

"I shall tell her you are a good, true man—the noblest I have ever known! I shall tell her it is wrong for her to refuse to marry you! O Warren, let me go to her—I want to do it!" she repeated, her face glowing with its generous heroism.

He drew her into his arms. "How can I let you subject yourself to such an ordeal? You could not bear it. You are unstrung with the strain of these past dark weeks—and another straw, Edith, may be too much for even your brave endurance."

"No," she said, her arms about his neck; "you are all I have in the world now. I would die for your happiness. To have your precious love and friendship again—even though not in the old romantic way—is my one solace now. Let me be deserving of it—let me do something to atone for my past folly."

"You are bent upon going?"

"Yes, Warren—let me."

And a few moments later, she was driving in her closed carriage to the little home of the Chase girls.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHEN Nelda, to unburden her overcharged heart, poured into Virginia's sympathetic ears the story of her rejection of Warren Hyde's proposal of marriage; of his pain at her steadfast withstanding of his passionate pleadings and arguments; of his firm conviction that did she know his true history she could not hesitate to give herself to the man to whom God had united her through their sacred love;—when Virginia had listened to it all, great was Nelda's astonishment to hear her verdict.

"If I were in your place," she solemnly affirmed, "if I loved him, I should trust him. I should trust him enough to believe him when he told me that if I knew all, I could not hesitate to give myself to him."

"But he looks upon such things, Virginia, as I cannot," Nelda sorrowfully protested. "He is utterly 'free-thinking' and 'emancipated' in his views of marriage, of religion, of everything. *I* don't believe that if I knew all, I should feel it right to take this cup of happiness!"

"He told you he *was sure you would.* He never speaks lightly—he means just what he

says. He knows you well enough to be able to judge how you would feel and think under a given condition. If he says he feels that in the light of the facts of the case, your conscience would justify your marrying him, then, Nelda Chase," she said, with sudden enthusiasm, "if you truly love him, you will lay your hand in his and trust him!"

"How dare I act so blindly?" Nelda asked, "and give over my conscience to the keeping of another? I know how different from mine his views of such things are. I know he thinks the union of George Eliot and Lewes was perfectly right; he thinks it was right for Ruskin's wife to go to Millais; and for Wagner to take for himself the wife of Von Bülow. Yet," she added, wonderingly, "he says he does not hold the marriage vow lightly; he says it is because he holds marriage as the holiest of life's relations, that he sanctions those cases, and that they were the truest of marriages! O Virginia!" she said, in distress, "when he talks to me so, I am afraid of him, for while my heart rebels against such theories, he carries my judgment with him and——"

"What judgment you have," Virginia interposed, laughing, "and precious little it is, dear! For myself," she said, "I agree with his shocking views most heartily!"

"What has made you change so? You were

not so anxious to have him for a brother-in-law a few months ago."

"I know him better now. And Nelda," she declared, "I believe in him! He is a grand man! If you refuse him, I shall think you unworthy of him!"

"How can I know that I would not be wronging Mrs. Hyde?"

"He told you that you would not."

"But think of her sad face! It would haunt me forever! And coming right upon her other dreadful sorrows! Virginia, I know what suffering is—how can I deliberately add to the pain of another, for the sake of my own happiness?"

"Maybe she would not suffer at all. And think how you make him suffer in refusing him."

It was at this point in their talk that "Quig" had come into the room bearing on a plate the black-edged card of Mrs. Edith Prince Hyde. "To see Miss Nelda," she announced.

Great was their wonder—almost consternation—at this event. Apprehension of disaster—of a tragic scene with this sorrow-laden woman—was the feeling with which Nelda's heart trembled as she went into the parlor to meet her.

The deep mourning of the sombrely-robed figure that rose to take her offered hand, struck

a chill to her very marrow. Yet in the midst of her nervousness and emotion, she received an instantaneous impression, in looking into the pale face of her visitor, of the startling resemblance she bore to herself. This impression was evidently mutual; for Mrs. Hyde kept her hand for an instant, as with a long, searching look, she gazed at her.

"You are surprised to see me, of course," spoke her low, sweet voice, when they had sat down, and had exchanged a few formal civilities. "Let me tell you at once what I came for. Or—perhaps you guess?"

"Indeed, I can't guess," Nelda helplessly answered. "Unless it is that you would—warn me against——"

She stopped in confusion. She could not speak the words in her mind to this stricken wife and mother.

"Warn you against what?" gently questioned Mrs. Hyde.

"Against marrying—him."

"That is not my errand." She hesitated a moment. "I came to tell you, Miss Chase, that there is no reason whatever why you should not marry Warren Hyde."

Nelda's startled eyes fastened themselves upon her in a sort of fearful fascination.

"No reason? *You* tell me that—Mrs. Hyde?"

"Not the shadow of a reason. Miss Chase," she went on, "if your love for him is what I believe it is—then you must know that he is the best and truest of men. If you really love him, you will trust yourself to him, when I—whom probably you think he once wronged—tell you that he is the noblest man I have ever known!"

"But," Nelda breathed, "I should be wronging you to take the place that is yours—surely it is yours!"

"It cannot be mine—it never rightly was mine——"; her voice broke and she colored deeply. "Can you not believe me when I tell you that there is *no* impediment in the way of your marriage with him?"

"But I can't see how that can be true!"

"No, you can't see. I can't explain it to you. But," she entreated, "can't you trust us—him and me? You must know we would not deceive you."

Nelda sorrowfully shook her head. "How can I enter into marriage so blindly? I cannot think it would be right! I should be unhappy—wretchedly unhappy."

"But he will be unhappy if you persist in your refusal. And you will not be unhappy if you marry him! Miss Chase, he has told me how he loves you and I know what his love can mean. You belong to him and you must

not—O indeed you must not refuse to marry him!"

"He has told *you* how he loves me?" Nelda asked, bewildered; she felt as if she were dreaming; her world seemed dim and unreal.

"Yes, he told me. He and I are truest friends. He is the only friend I have now," she said, sadly, "in the world. Unless," she added, leaning forward, "you will allow me to be your friend, and will let me persuade you to marry him."

"Why do you want me to marry him?"

"Because his happiness is dear to me."

"And it is dear to me," said Nelda. "But—O I can't marry him when I don't know! Don't persuade me!" she pleaded, passionately. "You tempt me so—you tempt me to seize this happiness which I know I ought not to take! You make me almost think it right to take it. And I need to be strengthened in my purpose not to take it—I am so weak—O Mrs. Hyde, help me not to yield—don't urge me to do what I know would be wrong!"

Her face fell into her hands and she sobbed. Her nerves were giving way to the strain of the past days. For a moment her sobs broke upon the silence of the room without interruption.

Suddenly, she felt a hand laid upon her head; she started and looked up; Mrs. Hyde had risen and was standing before her. Her face was

pale as death, but a resolution burned in her eyes. She had the look of a Joan of Arc, or of a Charlotte Corday.

"Is there no way to convince you—but one? Must I tell you? Then listen." Her throat trembled and her words seemed to choke her. Nelda's heart almost stood still with its strangely mingled suspense and awe and pity. Mrs. Hyde controlled herself and spoke—in a low, distinct, vibrating voice that made every word she uttered seem to pierce into the young girl's brain.

"Listen to me, then. You force me to tell you a secret which I had thought could never cross my lips. Which was locked in my heart and Warren's, never to be brought forth. We were divorced—not because we had ceased to love; not because of any wrong that he or I had done; but because—my mother, in an illness which she thought was going to be fatal, confessed to me that my husband was *her own son and my brother!*"

The room seemed to reel, for an instant, before Nelda's eyes. Mrs. Hyde sank into a chair at her side, and went on rapidly—almost breathlessly;

"Warren's unmarried 'uncle' who adopted him, was his natural father and my mother's lover. At the time of my mother's confession to me, my baby was but a month old. I had nearly died in his birth; and his deformity had

given to my already shattered nervous system a shock from which I hardly rallied. So this last dreadful horror was more than I could bear. My mind became affected. I conceived a frantic terror of Warren—my husband, who was also my brother! I would shriek when he came into my presence and run from him as if he were a leper. If he persisted in staying near me, I would fall into violent spasms. There were moments, it is true, when he succeeded in controlling me—when a sudden exercise of peremptory authority on his part subdued me to his will, just as I had once been subdued to it through my great love for him. He tried in every way to soothe and calm me. What he suffered no language can describe. He tried so hard to make a peaceable adjustment of our wretched situation. But—I seemed to think in my diseased state of mind, that nothing but violent measures could expiate our sin in having married. And you know the rest—the divorce—the utterly false gossip as to the cause of it—the misery, the wretched misery, of it all! The cause of the divorce stated in the indictment was, 'incompatibility of temper'—and scandal translated it, 'cruel and inhuman treatment.' Warren, as you know, went to Europe. He wrote to me sometimes—I did not answer. And he finally stopped writing. When after a few years, I became more normal, I began to

yearn for him with terrible longing—but I thought I had forever alienated him. So I did not write. And he did not know but that my violent antipathy toward him still existed. And indeed when he first came home,—and came one day to see me and our boy—there was such a rush of the old horror upon my soul, that I could not trust myself to let him see me often. Yet I loved him through it all—not with the old, romantic passion—but with—the deep affection one feels for a friend and comrade. And it was in that way, too, that his love for me had become transformed. And now, in our mutual sorrow in the death of our child, the last vestige of my antipathy has gone, and I love him freely as my friend. So fully and freely, that I am here to-day to make this confession to you—and you will never, never know what it has cost me!"

Nelda sank to her knees at Mrs. Hyde's chair, and obeying the swift impulse of her heart, she clasped her arms about her waist and laid her head upon this wounded woman's breast.

"I do feel what a terrible thing it was to you to tell me this!" she murmured. "I can never repay you!"

"Yes, you can. Let me tell Warren he may come to you, dear Nelda."

"I am not worthy of him—I did not love him enough to trust him!"

"Be worthy of him, hereafter, and he will make you a happy woman," Mrs. Hyde said, laying her soft hand on the young girl's forehead and smoothing the hair back from her face. "Happy? That does not say it! He has it in him to make a woman's life very, very blessed, Nelda!"

"I know it!" Nelda's low voice answered, a great joy quivering into her face. "I did not dream life could have such blessedness in store for me. But," she timidly asked, "you? What are you going to do?"

"I am going to England to live with my Uncle Benedict Prince—my father's only brother, who lives alone with his widowed sister in Devonshire. They want me very much, and their home by the sea, is the one spot on this earth my heart yearns after. Warren says that every summer he will come over to visit me. And you will come with him? And now," she concluded, with a long, weary sigh, as she bent to kiss Nelda's lips, "I must go back to send him to you, Nelda—for he is waiting for me, in what impatience you may know. I am almost happy, because of the great amends I have made him to-day, for the suffering I once caused him."

CHAPTER XXXII.

So the little house on High Street, where "the Chase girls" had lived and struggled so long, was at last broken up. For Virginia became Mrs. Wilhelm Osborn about the same time that Nelda electrified the whole community by becoming mistress of the Hyde establishment on High Street. Not that the community was less electrified by Virginia's marriage.

"But then, you know," said Mrs. Carlton to Mrs. Morris, in discussing the two engagements, "one can't be so surprised at hearing that that grand duchess of a girl has made a fine match, for she is so immensely handsome and clever—so altogether striking, you know. But that little, pale, modest Nelda—so retiring—and never would talk about herself or her affairs—how *she* ever managed to captivate that formidable and awe-inspiring Warren Hyde whom all the girls of Winchester have besieged in vain—*I* can't imagine!"

"I think she is much more attractive than her sister," affirmed Mrs. Morris, who had never forgiven Virginia for refusing to be swindled. "She is certainly a pretty girl—and

ever so much more sweet and winning than that great tall giraffe, Virginia, who stalks about as if she owned the town. For my part, I think Virginia Chase always had very aggressive manners."

"Well, isn't it astonishing to think of those two poor, overworked, underfed, shabbily-dressed girls marrying the two finest men in town! I simply can't get over it. Did you hear what they are going to do with their little brothers?"

"Warren Hyde has adopted Jack; and Ernest is to live with Virginia and the Bishop."

In the opinion of "Quig," the quiet double wedding of Virginia and Nelda was "the most morantic thing" she had ever heard of.

"I'm glad Miss Nelda's gettin' a big, masterful kind of a husband," she remarked to another chore-woman who was helping her clean the house preparatory to the great event; "fur I think she's the kind of a girl that jus' would not *enjoy* herself if she was married to a weak kind of a man. I often tole Mister I knew neither of them Chase girls wouldn't never marry 'til they could git some one that was real tony and awful book-learned. They're awful book-learned theirselves. Book-learnin'," she added, as she meditatively polished the frame of a large picture, "is a good thing to hev, it's sich a nice easy thing to make a livin' with, no

work nor nothin'. I'm educatin' my daughter fur to be a teacher," she said, with pride, "but it don't come easy to her. She says 'Mom, I always hev to stop and think 'fore I know which it's right to say, I seen, or I hev saw.' Them things *is* bewilderin', ain't they, now? Jus' mind this here!" she suddenly exclaimed, drawing the attention of her *aid-de-camp* to the oil-painting she was holding, "ain't this a handsome lan'scape scen'ry?"

She stuck her arms akimbo and stood off a step to admire it. "That pinkish sky, now, is perfeckly elygant, I think! Say! sometimes of a sundown, you kin see some awful han'some lan'scapes in the sky, can't you?"

"Fur my part," answered the assistant, "I like this here fruit scen'ry better," pointing to a little oil-painting of a dish of fruit; "it fairly makes a body's mouth water, ain't it does now? But what do you call this here!" she demanded, as she suddenly arrived, in her progress across the room, before the statue of the Venus.

"I heerd Miss Wirginia say that's Wenus Milo, a Greek lady, that stood to hev a bust of herself took. She must have been a decent baggage now!" Quig sarcastically added; "mustn't she? I think she was hard up fur somepin to do! But them foreigners," she added, with a hopeless sigh, "they don't know no better. It's a pity of 'em."

There was, of course, a vast amount of gossip as to the feelings and the fate of poor Edith Prince Hyde. The truth about her married life with Warren was never made known. The uncomfortable gossiping, however, had a chance to die out during the first year of Nelda's marriage, which she spent abroad; so that on her return to Winchester as a radiantly happy wife and mother, she was received by society without cavil or whisperings of scandal. People did watch her with some curiosity, for a time, to discover marks of her husband's possible "cruel inhumanity" upon her; but her happy face, her useful, normal life, disarmed the most suspicious.

The hard experiences through which Virginia and Nelda had passed had taught them, as nothing else could have done, how to help, with their now ample means, those who struggled under the burden of poverty and overwork; and they made right noble use of their knowledge.

Edith's young life was not doomed to perpetual loneliness. Fate brought in her way, at last, a man whom she was compelled to acknowledge the peer of Warren Hyde. And then, once again the sad history of her first marriage had to be related—but this time it was Warren who told the tale.

On the day when Edith was married, Nelda felt her cup of happiness "too full to be true," as she told Warren.

"Nemesis is surely at the door," she said, ominously shaking her head. "It can't last. Why, Warren, I am *perfectly* happy!"

"I shall have to take to ill-treating you to even things up, eh?" he asked, as they stood together before the great crackling wood fire in his library, his arm about her waist. "Nelda, the superstition isn't all out of you yet, even after three years of matter-of-fact life with a philosopher and a logician!"

"Matter-of-fact life? Our life is one long romance!" she declared.

"I am glad you think so, dear. For if you ever discovered it to be prosaic, I think you would positively grow sulky on my hands."

"No wonder, Warren, that I am distrustful of too much happiness. You can never, never know," she, said gravely, "what wretched sadness Virginia and I have borne."

"You forget, beloved, that I, too, have had my visits from Nemesis."

"No," she gently corrected him, "I don't forget that. And I know yours were no easier to bear than mine. But there! Why should we admit any but happy memories to-day? Warren," she said, lifting her bright, sweet face to look into his, "I could never have dreamed, in those sad, dark times, that anywhere in the whole universe, there waited for me such deeply satisfying happiness as my life with you has been."

He pressed his lips to her upturned forehead; "Aren't you 'mighty easy' satisfied?" he doubtfully asked.

But his own "deeply satisfying happiness" was stamped unmistakably upon his strong, earnest face.

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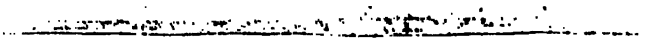

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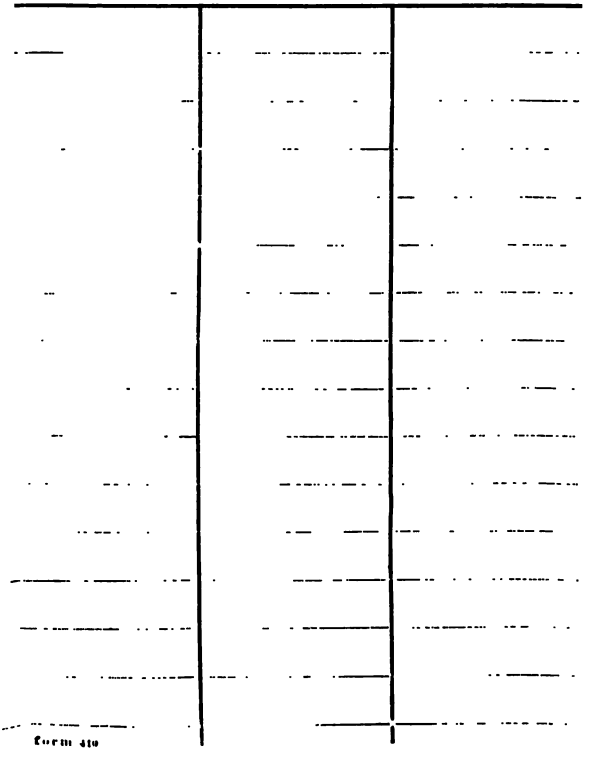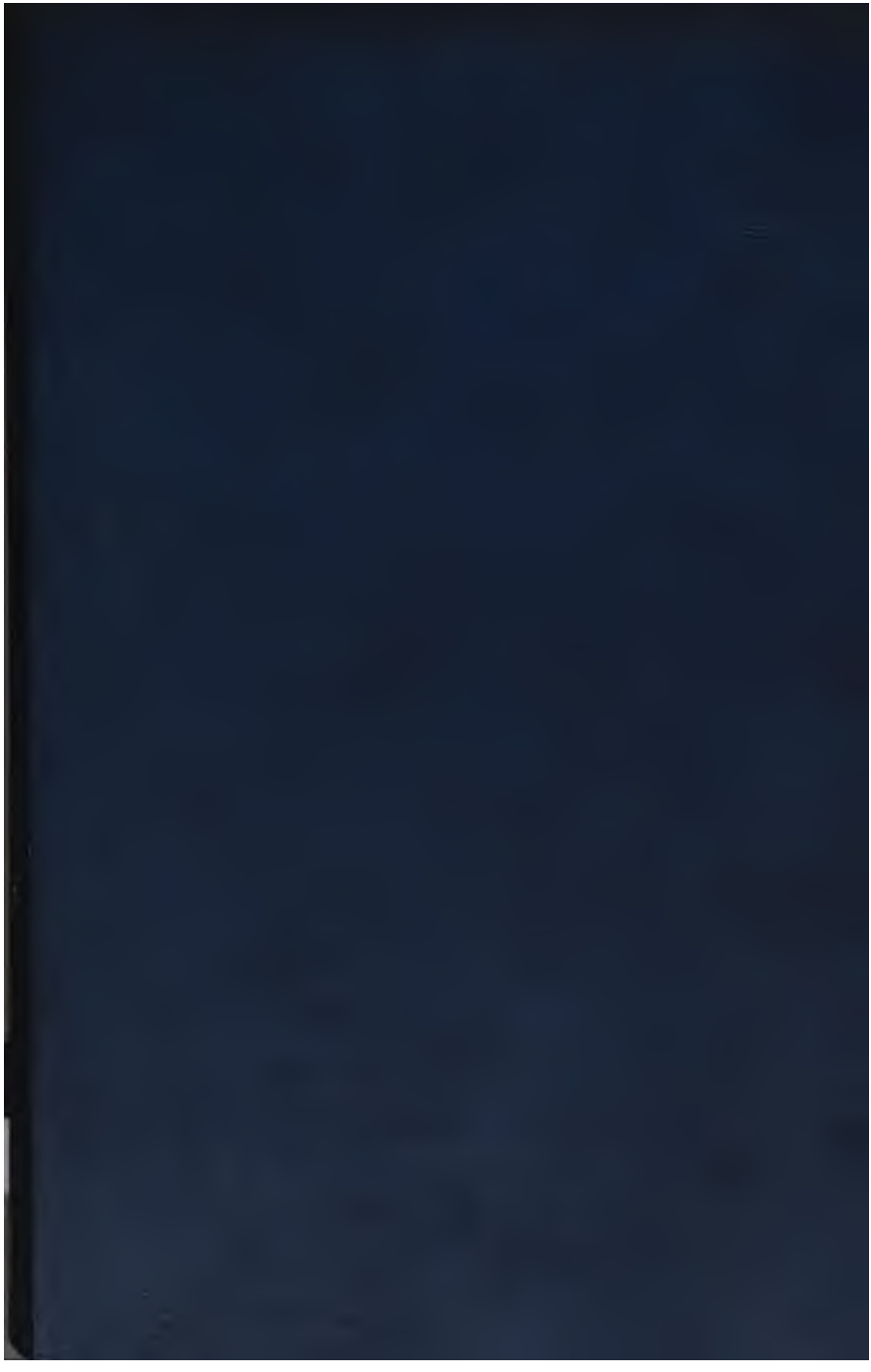
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